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문학석사 학위논문

A Black Woman's Gaze
and “Power of the Erotic”
in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

『그들의 눈은 신을 보고 있었다』에 나타난
흑인 여성의 응시와 ‘에로틱의 힘’

2016 년 8 월

서울대학교 대학원

영어영문학과 문학 전공

이 은 샘

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and "Power of the Erotic"
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Abstract

A Black Woman's Gaze and "Power of the Erotic" in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

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This thesis examines the journey during which Janie Crawford Killicks Starks Woods in Zora Neale Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* becomes a black female subject with the power of gaze and the erotic. Resourcefully utilizing the period of oppression as the period of self-growth, Janie develops her sight into her own "oppositional gaze," the expression employed by bell hooks to attest to black female spectators' resistant agency in their act of looking back. In accord with hooks's theorization of "the oppositional gaze," this thesis argues that Janie cultivates her own "oppositional gaze," which eventually dismantles Joe's patriarchal power when expressed in the form of verbal attack. Thus being

the means of self-preservation, Janie's gaze further provides her an opportunity to become a woman with the erotic power. Borrowing Audre Lorde's idea of black women's "power of the erotic," this thesis asserts that both Janie's sexual satisfaction in her relationship with Tea Cake and the cultural bond with the muck people are crucial in defining her as an erotic being. Although the couple's love ends due to the violence triggered by Tea Cake's internalized racism, Janie confidently affirms the meaning of her experiences from the marriage, the confidence stemming from her identity as an erotic subject.

Keywords: Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, "the oppositional gaze," black oral culture, "the power of the erotic," black female sexuality, the muck, black female subjectivity
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I. Introduction

Zora Neale Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* follows the protagonist Janie Crawford Killicks Starks Woods's life journey to "utilize [her]self all over" (*Their Eyes Were Watching God*¹ 112). Wishing to lead her life as an active subject of every worldly experience, Janie takes opportunities that affect her life in significant ways. As the long list of her last names indicates, she goes through three marriages, respectively with Logan Killicks, Joe Starks, and Vergible Tea Cake Woods. The diverse experiences from each marriage shape Janie's personality and belief, based on which she affirms the meaning of her journey. Janie tells Pheoby, "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" (*Their Eyes* 192), implying that she has indeed "lived for herself." This thesis examines the development of her gaze and the following realization of her erotic power as the main driving forces that enable Janie to give self-approval to her knowledge and experiences from the life journey.

Mainly during the second marriage with Joe Starks, Janie gradually cultivates her gaze, the meaning of which lies in accordance with hooks's employment of the term, "the oppositional gaze." I borrow hooks's expression to examine Janie's life full of struggles during the period of

¹ Hereafter *Their Eyes*.

oppression. In her essay “The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators,” hooks asserts that “[t]here is power in looking” (115), which opens up the possibility of agency for black people. According to hooks, the black women, called “black female spectators,” watch their distorted body images in TV shows and movies, with acute awareness of the stereotypical representation of their body images in the Western- and male-centered media products. Though consuming the racist and sexist works of the mass media, black female spectators negate and even laugh at those misrepresentations with the capacity to define themselves in their own terms. Janie develops her own gaze whose resistant and self-affirming agency resembles the black female spectators’ “oppositional gaze.” She utilizes her gaze to appreciate herself in her own words and to apprehend Joe’s intention to forge her false body images. Moreover, empowered by her “oppositional gaze,” Janie succeeds to verbally attack Joe, which results in divesting him of his power as a patriarchal oppressor.

Furthermore, I identify Janie as an erotic subject who gives self-authorization to her sexuality and sexual experience. My reading is based on Audre Lorde’s idea of black women’s “power of the erotic.” In her essay “The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power,” Lorde accounts the erotic of black women as a great source of power that she believes has been historically devalued by both the white- and male-centered world and black women themselves. Lorde strongly argues for a new, positive, and expanded

definition of the erotic, and “works to expand the function of the erotic, seeing sexuality as activating and illuminating all parts of life” (Ferguson 298). Speaking on behalf of black women, Lorde metaphorically describes her erotic experience as “the longed-for bed which [she] enter[s] gratefully and from which [she] rise[s] up empowered” (Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic” 55), postulating the erotic of black women as the very site from which they could “rise up empowered.” In accordance with Lorde’s theorization of black women’s erotic power, I read Janie as a black woman whose “lifeforce” stems from her beliefs in “the power of the erotic” (Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic” 55). In pursuit of a sexually satisfying marriage, Janie prefigures an erotic black woman that Lorde presents in her essay several decades later. Even when engaged in loveless marriages, Janie never abandons her faith in meeting the “bee-man” with whom she can consummate the ideal erotic relationship. Janie’s belief in the erotic ultimately leads her to meet Tea Cake who helps actualize her dreams of being in a healthy sexual marriage, marriage in which a husband and wife claim equal rights to each other.

As Lorde believes in the capacity of the erotic to embrace not only the sexual but other positive meanings in black women’s life, the experience and knowledge Janie gains in Everglades contribute to establishing her as an erotic being. Lorde explains that the erotic knowledge can become “a lens through which we [black women] scrutinize all aspects of our existence” (“Uses of the Erotic” 57). Enlarging the scope of influence of the erotic,

Lorde further notes the expansiveness of life experience and knowledge black women can acquire through their belief in the erotic. When reading Janie's life in Everglades in this vein, the erotic becomes the very channel through which she finds a fuller meaning of her life. What characterizes her third marriage is the sensual and bodily experience she gains in Everglades. Not only the joyful sexual plays with Tea Cake but her active participation in the communal activities, such as dancing and tale-telling, also constitute her bodily experience and knowledge, all of which fall in the scope of the erotic's positive influence. Actively partaking in the celebration of the community's culture, Janie constitutes an important part of the black working class culture, the experiences that render Tea Cake's role in Janie's life all the more meaningful. However, when Tea Cake's physical violence disrupts the power balance between the couple, triggered by his internalized racism, Janie kills Tea Cake, preserving only the good memories of their marriage. In Janie's solitary yet triumphant return to Eatonville, Hurston presents not only the paralyzing impact of racism on black Americans' everyday life but Janie's capacity to embalm her erotic love with Tea Cake nevertheless.

Despite the obvious emphasis Hurston places on her protagonist's struggles to achieve self-realization, when *Their Eyes* was first published in 1937, critics paid less attention to Janie's self-realization than to the fictional representation of the black folk. Some critics were disturbed by

Hurston's portrayal of black people. Most notably, Hurston's contemporary writer Richard Wright lambasted *Their Eyes* in his review "Between Laughter and Tears." He criticized *Their Eyes* for having "no theme, no message, no thought" and being cloaked in "facile sensuality" (25). He also contended that Hurston fostered the minstrel image of black people in *Their Eyes*, perpetually stuck and moving within the pendulum between laughter and tears: the novel was another fictional reproduction of the minstrel show for "a white audience whose chauvinistic tastes she knows how to satisfy" (25), Wright argued. He thus accused her of writing to please the white readership.²

Hurston's former supporter and teacher at Howard University, Alain Locke also commented on the novel in his review of the black writers' works of 1937, "Jingo, Counter-Jingo, and US." Locke advised Hurston to move on from telling entertaining stories without addressing serious social issues of the time. He contended that it was Hurston's responsibility as a fully able writer to write "motive fiction and social document fiction" rather

² In the essay "Blueprint for Negro Writing" which was published in the same year with *Their Eyes*, Wright urges that a black writer—specifically gendered as male—have a keen awareness of the American social, political, economic scene and reflect it in the realistic depiction of the urban working class black people. He calls for the role of literature which could have interrelation with American society. To Wright who believed that "[p]erspective for Negro writers will come when they have looked and brooded so hard and long upon the harsh lot of their race," Hurston's depiction of the Southern blacks as people who enjoy entertaining themselves within the area less affected by the Jim Crow law than other regions in U.S.—for it was a segregated place from white residence—seemed anything but unacceptable ("Blueprint" 51).

than “the legend of these entertaining pseudo-primitives” (10). While Wright criticized Hurston’s depiction of the Southern black people as reinforcing the racial stereotype, Locke saw it as genuine but oversimplified. In his view, Hurston failed to delve deeper into the black communal life: “Her gift for poetic phrase, for rare dialect, and folk humor keep her flashing on the surface of her community and her characters and from diving deep either to the inner psychology of characterization or to sharp analysis of the social background” (11). In this light, Hurston’s depiction of rural black Americans was only producing meaningless laughs from the reader, lacking social significance.

Both Wright and Locke critiqued Hurston’s fictional representation of the black race as being inappropriate and shallow. The critics’ disapprobation alludes to the era’s contentious view on what is the “proper” racial image. The influence of the Harlem Renaissance, which flourished in the first two decades of the twentieth century, still lingered into the 1930’s among the African-American literati.³ As Robert Hemenway

³ One of the early Harlem Renaissance critics, Nathan Irvin Huggins extensively reviews the movement in his book *Harlem Renaissance*. He assesses the Harlem Renaissance as a failure due to the lack of “grass-roots attachment” (48), only involving intellectuals as the main participants. Examining the movement in its relation to modernism in his book *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, Houston A. Baker defines the Harlem Renaissance as “an outpouring of writing, music, and social criticism that included some of the earliest attempts by Afro-American artists and intellectuals to define themselves in ‘modern’ terms” (9). He objects to the earlier criticisms which assessed the movement as a failure. He writes that scholars should “reconceptualize the questions [they] will ask in order

writes in his landmark book *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*, which greatly contributed to bringing critics' attention back to Hurston and her works, "many black intellectuals [in the early twenties] believed that books by black authors needed to tell the 'total truth' to white America. Books about the race should aim to destroy the absurd beliefs and racist fantasies of the suppressing culture, and such books would necessarily at times bitter" (219). Cheryl A. Wall also comments on the black male intellectuals' reviews of *Their Eyes* that "they faulted the novel for its alleged lack of racial militancy" (*Women of the Harlem Renaissance* 196). During the time when black writers were expected to present specific racial images that could lessen the sufferings of the race, Hurston's portrayals of the Southern blacks as laughing, playing, and gambling people were generally seen as problematic by her contemporaneous critics, and consequently her works went out of print for decades.

It was only in the 1970s that Hurston's works were seen in a new light with the efforts of black scholars. As Wall writes in her essay "Zora

to locate the efforts of the 1920s" (14). In her book *Women of the Harlem Renaissance*, Cheryl A. Wall focuses her analysis on the female writers who contributed to or were excluded from the movement. In this book Wall explores the double hardships that black female writers faced within the white- and male-centered academia. In one of the recent analyses of the Harlem Renaissance, *The Harlem Renaissance: The One and the Many*, Mark Helbling aptly summarizes the expansive arguments of the Harlem Renaissance critics from 1960s to the late twentieth century. Helbling's analysis of the Harlem Renaissance can be useful in tracking the history of the movement's criticism. His own perspective in analyzing the Harlem Renaissance is reading the tension an individual black writer felt towards the racialized need to collectively represent the black race.

Neale Hurston: Changing Her Own Words,” “[b]y [1970s] feminists were retrieving works by ‘lost’ women writers, a category for which Hurston was eminently qualified” (77). Hurston, who insisted on regarding skin color as “a little pigmentation more or less” (Hurston, “How It Feels” 153), as a wearable social identity, was seen as the ideal model whose confidence and pride in her race captured the black feminist scholars’ attention in the seventies. Preceding Robert Hemenway’s work by a few years, Alice Walker largely contributed to this project of “resurrecting” Hurston. Figuring herself as Hurston’s imaginary niece in her essay “Looking for Zora,” first published in 1975, Walker vividly reports to the reader her journey to find Hurston’s neglected grave, writing in the present tense throughout the whole essay and thereby inviting the reader into the symbolic act of paying due tribute to Hurston.

Following Walker’s lead, other critics also began to make new evaluations of Hurston’s works, especially of *Their Eyes* in which Janie’s significance in the African American literary scene was newly acknowledged. Unlike the black intellectuals in 1930s who centered on analyzing the racial representation of African Americans in the novel, these critics focused on the individuality of Janie and the degree to which she becomes a self-realized being. Yvonne Johnson acclaims *Their Eyes* as “the first self-conscious effort by an American ethnic writer not only to subvert patriarchal discourse but also to give voice to women of color” (44).

Johnson explains how Hurston addresses “not only the African American mode of storytelling in dialect, but also the polyphony associated with both African American and feminist perspective” (62). Similarly, Missy Dehn Kubitschek in her essay “‘Tuh De Horizon and Back’: The Female Quest in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*” refutes the earlier criticisms that read the novel only as a superficial love story, by putting much emphasis on Janie’s quest to transform herself from a powerless female subject to a person with “independence and strength of the archetypal quester” (109).

In this vein, whether Janie can be seen as a self-empowered black subject has been mainly discussed in relation to the articulation of her voice. Because Janie’s self-realization and acquisition of voice were considered inseparable, the critics extensively examined the articulation of Janie’s voice within the black community. Barbara Christian evaluates Janie as a speaker who autonomously tells the story of her life: “Janie Stark [sic] tells the story of her childhood, her life, and her loves to her best friend, Phoebe [sic] and to the community to which she has just returned” (57). Also, in his essay “*Their Eyes Were Watching God: Hurston and the Speakerly Text*,” Henry Louis Gates Jr. argues that Janie’s voice is articulated to its full extent in the black community. According to Gates, the speakerly text’s rhetorical strategy represents the black oral literary tradition, and helps the reader imagine that the text is being orally narrated instead of being textually read. Gates further claims that *Their Eyes* is the first example of the speakerly text

in African American literature, and endorses Janie as a “speaking black subject” with her voice fully realized at the end of her journey (196).

On the other hand, some critics suggested that Janie fails to be “a speaking subject” and remains an unrealized being until the end. Robert Stepto asserts that Janie’s failure to speak reveals “the essential illusion” of fashioning her as a woman with her own voice (166). Stepto regards the narrator’s and Janie’s voice completely separate, and emphasizes the fact that the novel is not narrated in Janie’s own voice. It is his main argument that “Hurston’s curious insistence on having Janie’s tale—her personal history in and as a literary form—told by an omniscient third person, rather than by a first-person narrator, implies that Janie has not really won her voice and self after all” (166). Mary Helen Washington develops Stepto’s argument further in her essay “‘I Love the Way Janie Crawford Left Her Husbands’: Emergent Female Hero” by contending that *Their Eyes* is “a novel about a woman outside of the folk community” and that it “represents women’s exclusion from power, particularly from the power of oral speech” (98). Pointing out Hurston’s “ambivalen[ce] about giving a powerful voice to a woman like Janie who is already in rebellion against male authority and against the roles prescribed for women in a male dominated society” (103), Washington argues that both Janie’s oppressive husbands and Hurston herself partake in silencing Janie’s voice.

Although critics stand on opposite ends in terms of Janie's voice and self-realization, their readings present in common the emphasis on her selfhood. They center their discussion on the degree to which Janie becomes a self-actualized being and affirms the power of her voice at the end of the journey. I attempt to re-direct the focus from Janie's voice to her gaze and sexuality to gauge her spiritual growth. In Eatonville Janie is given no chance to display her verbal competency due to Joe's social marginalization. Nevertheless, she makes use of the period of alienation as the period of self-growth, and concentrates on developing her inner self unobstructed by the outside oppression. Determined to lead a sexually fulfilling life, Janie silently stays in rebellion against Joe's patriarchal oppression and focuses on maturing her sight into "the oppositional gaze."

On Janie's path to self-realization, the husbands play crucial parts, each in their own way. The marriage with Logan Killicks teaches Janie an important life lesson that love does not always entail marriage. Still, it is too short to leave a strong imprint on Janie, especially when she does not have any affection for him. On the other hand, her marriage with Joe Starks and Tea Cake Woods exert great influence in forming and developing her subjectivity. The years of suppression with Joe allow Janie to concentrate on maturing her inner self in isolation, and the bodily experience and knowledge she gains in her life with Tea Cake satisfy her long-held desires for sexual fulfilment and cultural interaction. Hurston gives a brief

delineation of Janie's relationship with her husbands in the letter to William Stanley Hoole sent in 1936, a year before *Their Eyes* was published:

My next novel is to be a novel about a woman who was from childhood hungry for life and the earth, but because she had beautiful hair, was always being skotched upon a flag-pole by the men who loved her and forced to sit there. At forty she got her chance at mud. Mud, lush and fecund with a buck Negro called Teacake. He took her down into the Everglades where people worked and sweated and loved and died violently, where no such thing as flag-poles for women existed. (*Zora Neale Hurston: Life in Letters* 366-67)

Because of her beautiful hair, Janie is forced to sit on a "flag-pole" by the husbands who nevertheless love her. After descending the "flag-pole," which is later in the novel changed into the "high stool" (*Their Eyes* 114), Janie is given a chance to live in the "lush and fecund" mud wherein Tea Cake's cultural roots lie. Although detailed information about the novel is missing in this short account, we can still clearly see that the novel centers on satiating Janie's hunger "for life and the earth" in the mud as well as on completing her journey. In analyzing Janie's search "for life and the earth," then, I argue that the power of her gaze and erotic experiences greatly contributes to making her search successful. Janie's ability to look critically,

which eventually turns into her “oppositional gaze,” strikes down Joe’s patriarchy and paves the way for Tea Cake to enter her life. With Tea Cake, Janie establishes herself as an erotic being, absorbing the sexual and cultural knowledge and experience she gains in the muck.

To examine Janie’s gaze, Deborah Clarke’s essay “‘The Porch Couldn’t Talk for Looking’: Voice and Vision in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*” is useful in understanding the significance of gaze in Janie’s journey to self-realization. It is her main argument that Janie’s vision becomes one with her voice at the end of her journey. Clarke claims that Hurston “offers the possibility of reclaiming the visual as a means of black expression and black power” (600). In Clarke’s view, the main function of the visual in the novel is the affirmation of “female agency.” She contends that “[Hurston] recasts the visual to affirm the beauty and power of color and to provide a vehicle for female agency” (600), Janie, in turn, becoming an active agent of her life by being able to control her visual power. Ultimately, at the end of the novel her voice and vision are integrated into one, thereby completing the construction of self. This integration allows Janie to become “both spectator and participant in her own life” (Clarke 611).

I build on Clarke’s argument and further argue that Janie develops her instinctual sight into “the oppositional gaze.” According to hooks, black people negate the racist media representation of the race, developing “critical spectatorship” in their act of watching. As briefly explained earlier,

hooks asserts that black female spectators have developed the ability to critically assess the cinematic negation and distortion of the body images of black women, in attempts to resist “identifying with neither the phallogentric gaze nor the construction of white womanhood” (126). In other words, black female spectators have created their own space of agency by developing “the oppositional gaze,” building the black female spectatorship into “a site of resistance” (hooks 128).

Following hook’s emphasis on “the ability to manipulate one’s gaze in the face of structures of domination” to understand Janie’s means of resistance against Joe’s patriarchal oppression (hooks 116), I argue that Janie silently develops her sight into “the oppositional gaze” under severe oppression by Joe in Eatonville. Although her sight is characteristically insightful, it is not powerful enough to defeat the suppressive outside forces, not until it is presented in the form of “the oppositional gaze.” Ironically, Joe’s obsessive control over Janie lends her time and space to focus on her inner self, the consummation of which is manifested as Janie’s projection of her “oppositional gaze” onto Joe’s body and the following verbalization of her visual analysis. Examining his body at a distance, Janie not only senses his immanent death but further catches “the cunning thoughts” racing inside his head (*Their Eyes* 77). Janie’s powerful “naming” of what she visually recognizes in Joe with her “oppositional gaze” eventually dismantles his abusive power.

In addition to her gaze, the sexual and cultural experiences in Everglades are equally important as they establish Janie's identity as an erotic being. As stated earlier, I use the term "erotic" in accord with Audre Lorde. In an interview with Adrienne Rich held a year after writing the essay, Lorde re-addresses the importance of redefining the erotic. She suggests that "The only way we [black women] can [fight old power] is by creating another whole structure that touches every aspect of our existence, at the same time as we are resisting" (Lorde, "Interview" 103). By "another whole structure" Lorde refers to the erotic, with which she believes black women can both have their own way of resisting "the old power" of the male-dominant power structure, and define their knowledge and experience in their own terms.⁴

To borrow Margaret Kissam Morris's words, Lorde "repositions marginal categories, placing them in the center of her discourse" (178). The major marginal category repositioned in "Uses of the Erotic" is the erotic. Lorde not only places the erotic at the center of her discourse but introduces

⁴ Having black women's own means of resistance is a theme Lorde repeatedly emphasizes in her other speeches and essays. Most notably, in the essay, originally a speech, "The Master's Tool Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," Lorde speaks for and to the women who are considered "unacceptable" by American society—poor, lesbian, Black, and aged women. Arguing that "the tools of a racist patriarchy" will only allow "the most narrow perimeters of change" ("The Master's Tool" 110-11), Lorde underlines the need to form a community of interdependency in which differences between women can be valued as "that raw and powerful connection from which [women's] personal power is forged" (Lorde, "The Master's Tool" 112).

its expanded meaning in black women's lives, naming her erotic experience as that which cannot be "relegated to bedroom alone" ("Uses of the Erotic" 57). Ordinary activities that make up everyday life can be erotic experiences as long as one stays in connection with herself. As much as the sensual and bodily matters are important, the feelings of satisfaction are indispensable for composing one's erotic experience. In this sense, it must be noted that Lorde specifically distinguishes the erotic from the pornographic, the latter of which she writes as "the suppression of true feeling...emphasiz[ing] sensation without feeling" ("Uses of the Erotic" 54). That is, whereas the erotic aspires to the exploration of sincerest feelings, the pornographic only emphasizes carnal sensations.

As such, feeling composes an indispensable part of "the power of the erotic." According to Lorde, the erotic can actualize both the connection with another person and with one's own self. On the one hand, the erotic experience enables one to share joy and any pursuit with another person, the process during which a connection in the deepest level is formed between the sharers. Then, the understanding stemming from this connection lessens antagonism generated in the name of difference. On the other hand, it also allows "the open and fearless underlining of [one's] capacity for joy" (Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic" 56), which is to self-authorize one's erotic power. Lorde writes that "that deep and irreplaceable knowledge of my capacity for joy comes to demand from all of my life that it be lived within the

knowledge that such satisfaction is possible” (Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic” 57). Thus, those who share their deepest feelings with their loved ones and acknowledge their own capacities for joy, are capable of “erotic love” which is “shar[ing] the power of each other’s feelings” (Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic” 58).

I attempt to understand Janie in the context of Lorde’s idea of the erotic, to read Janie as an erotic black woman whose strength comes from her belief and exercise of “the power of the erotic.” The wide scope of feelings Janie newly encounters and the bodily experiences she gains through cultural interaction with the muck people, intricately work together to comprise her as an erotic being. Although Janie meets Tea Cake who shares her desires for erotically satisfying experience, their erotic love meets a sudden end when Janie shoots Tea Cake. The reasons for the abrupt end of Janie and Tea Cake’s love lie in Tea Cake’s insecurities incited by internalized racism, all of which, I believe, is part of what Hurston tries to present to the American readership.

This thesis examines the process through which Janie develops her own “oppositional gaze” and satisfies erotic desires, the experiences defining her as a gazing and erotic subject. Her firm determination to experience sexual fulfilment gives her strength to endure Joe’s oppression and eventually to mature her sight into “the oppositional gaze.” At the same time, Janie’s resistant agency, as expressed in her gaze and verbalized in her

own voice, enables her to keep pursuing her sexual desires after surviving and overcoming Joe's patriarchal oppression. Thus, Janie's identity as both a gazing and erotic subject is essential to continuing and finishing her journey with satisfaction at the end.

In the second chapter, I will center my discussion on Janie's identity as a black woman with her own "oppositional gaze." Applying hooks's discussion of the black people's power in the act of looking back, I will examine the visual metaphors and tropes in relation to Janie's gaze and examine her identity as a subject with resistant agency. Because Janie's voice is the medium through which her "oppositional gaze" is outwardly articulated, I will also look into the moment the visual and oral means of resistance cooperate in defeating Joe. The third chapter will explore Janie's life after the second marriage, the time during which she establishes herself as an erotic subject. Borrowing Audre Lorde's discussion of the erotic, I will examine how the sexual satisfaction Janie gains in her relationship with Tea Cake and the cultural engagement with the muck people make up her erotic knowledge and experience in Everglades. In the end, although Janie is forced to shoot Tea Cake in self-defense, she returns home triumphantly as a woman whose strength as an erotic being enables her to endorse and embrace her memories in Everglades. In order to apprehend the circumstance in which the couple's erotic love comes to an end, I will conclude the chapter by examining Tea Cake's insecurities in his

relationship with Janie, which I believe are rooted in his internalized racist ideas.

II. Acquiring Resistant Agency:

Janie with “the Oppositional Gaze”

In this chapter, I argue that during her second marriage Janie’s sight develops into the main tool with which, when outwardly articulated in her own voice, she overpowers her oppressive husband Joe Starks. The time that Janie stays as “Mrs. Mayor,” for more than two decades, is the most trying period of her life, especially because she promises herself that she will “struggle with life” in every way possible (*Their Eyes* 11). Nonetheless, as Michael Cooke puts forth, “[t]he more [Janie] is threatened, the more resourceful she becomes. The more she is deprived, the more self-sufficient she becomes” (72). Indeed, Janie’s sight proves “resourceful” as it transforms into what bell hooks terms “the oppositional gaze” of black female spectators in cinematic studies. At the core of “the oppositional gaze” is the power to resist the dominant and oppressive system’s distorted images of black women. I read Janie’s visual analysis of Joe in light of hooks’s notion of the resistant black females. After a long period of self-maturation, Janie not only returns the gaze back to the oppressive Joe but succeeds in making real changes in life by verbalizing her gaze before Eatonville villagers. It is important to point out that Janie’s gaze becomes meaningful when articulated in words and in her own voice: Janie comes to articulate her visual examination, empowered by her “oppositional gaze.” In this vein,

I examine the ways Janie brilliantly forms her thoughts into words and “signifies” upon the listener, regardless of the male-centered oral culture of Eatonville.

I use the term “sight” to indicate Janie’s physical act of looking. In other words, sight refers to the understandings that Janie acquires based on what she visually examines, and it is different from her gaze which includes a wider scope of meaning. Although Janie’s sight is insightful from the beginning of her journey, it only indicates the physical act of looking, which is yet devoid of resistant agency later developed in her gaze. The first instance that Janie gains understanding of herself through a visual means takes place when she sees a black girl in a photograph taken with other children but does not understand that the black girl is herself. Spending childhood surrounded by white children, Janie thinks she is white: “[b]efore Ah seen de picture Ah thought Ah wuz just like de rest,” Janie tells Pheoby. During her childhood Janie is called “Alphabet” by whites at the farm, her nickname signifying the lack of individuality. Janie recalls to Pheoby, “[the white people] all useter call me Alphabet ’cause so many people had done named me different names” (*Their Eyes* 9). Rachel Blau DuPlessis reads this nickname as a sign “constructed by Hurston to be conflictual and heterogeneous in the array of race, gender role, age, class, and sexual markers” (95). As a conglomeration of heterogeneous signs Janie is dubbed

“Alphabet” by the white society in which she could not have any definitive or individual subjectivity.

Failing to perceive herself in the picture, Janie is told that she is the “real dark little girl with long hair,” and only then does she exclaim, “Aw, aw! Ah’m colored!” That Janie asks a question about herself for the first time by looking at the photograph is worth noting. By using the specifically visual means—photography—Hurston introduces Janie into the world of self-consciousness. Trying to find herself in the photograph, Janie says “Where is me? Ah don’t see me” (*Their Eyes* 9). It is her first attempt to identify herself in the world that erases her individuality by calling her “Alphabet.” Stuart Burrows claims that “[n]ot only is photography the vehicle for the central moment of self-recognition in the novel—Janie’s discovery of her own blackness—but photographic discourse is crucial to the novel’s exploration of black identity” (2). As Burrows notes this photograph scene comes to play a crucial role in Janie’s life.

Having attempted to see herself in the photograph in her childhood, adolescent Janie discovers her sexual desires by beholding the interactions of natural objects. The scene in which Janie first becomes aware of the world of sexual pleasures is replete with visual metaphors and imagery. This indicates that she discovers her sexual desires through the act of looking, revealing the reciprocal direction of influence between her sight, later developed into her gaze, and sexual dreams. In other words, Janie’s

sight enables her to experience the transforming moment in terms of her sexuality; by looking at the union of the bee and blossom which in Janie's eyes symbolizes an ideal marriage, she becomes firmly determined to find her own "bee-man."

Janie is called "to come and gaze on a mystery" by the blossom in the pear tree (*Their Eyes* 10). Seeing the pollination of the bee and the bloom, Janie "had been summoned to behold a revelation" which sets her path onto finding her own bee-man thereafter. In Janie's attempts to affirm this newly acquired vision, the act of looking and looking further is particularly emphasized: "She searched as much of the world as she could from the top of the front steps and then went on down to the front gate and leaned over to gaze up and down the road. Looking, waiting, breathing short with impatience. Waiting for the world to be made" (11). It is clear that seeing plays a crucial role in this scene. Hurston underlines Janie's longing to find her own singing bees by richly employing the images of looking further the road beyond the confined space of Nanny's house.

Moreover, by using visual metaphors, Hurston notes that this event opens Janie's eyes and marks the beginning of her lifelong search for sexual pleasures. Right after experiencing this visionary moment, Janie spots a local boy walking by the house: "Through the pollinated air she saw a glorious being coming up the road. In her *former blindness* she had known him as shiftless Johnny Taylor, tall and lean. That was before the golden

dust of pollen had beglamored his rags and her eyes” (*Their Eyes* 11-12; emphasis added). Leaving behind the days of “former blindness,” her eyes are newly glamored by “the golden dust of pollen,” attracting her to Johnny Taylor who used to be “shiftless” but now is seen as a candidate for Janie’s bee-man. She is now introduced into a whole new world of sensualities and it is her sight which throws her into this adolescent vision.

The importance of sight in Janie’s life is further implicated when her grandmother Nanny first speaks of marrying Janie off to Logan. Janie responds to her grandmother’s determination by visualizing what Logan “looks like.” Janie’s use of simile indicates her reliance on her sight in making important life judgments. She protests to Nanny that “[Logan] look like some ole skullhead in de grave yard” (*Their Eyes* 13). Janie’s sight connects him with death as she likens him to a skull in the grave yard. This simile signifies the cost she soon comes to pay for the first lesson in her life through the marriage; Janie’s dreams about marriage naturally generating love wither shortly after the marriage.

Young and clumsy at articulating her thoughts, she follows Nanny’s order, even though she insightfully identifies Logan as the desecrator of her pear tree vision: “The vision of Logan Killicks was desecrating the pear tree, but Janie didn’t know how to tell Nanny that” (*Their Eyes* 14). As Janie’s instinct previously registers him as a skull, the visualized image of Logan here again defiles Janie’s “sacred” pear tree.

Before getting married, Janie asks herself questions about love and marriage: “There are years that ask questions and years that answer. Janie had had no chance to know things, so she had to ask. Did marriage end the cosmic loneliness of the unmated? Did marriage compel love like the sun the day?” (21). To these questions, the more mature Janie after marriage comes to say no.

When looking at Logan, Janie does not feel the sexual urge that she has experienced under the blooming pear tree. Instead, she only sees his unattractive outer appearance and hates the way he looks. It is apparent that Logan whose “head is so long one way and so flat on de sides” and who has “dat pone uh fat back uh his neck,” according to Janie’s description, can never be her dream man. Several months after the marriage Janie tells her grandmother that “[s]ome folks never was meant to be loved and [Logan’s] one of ’em.” Not only his flat-sided head and fat neck but his big belly and mule-like toe-nails also repel Janie from having any affection for him: “Ah’d ruther be shot wid tacks than tuh turn over in de bed and stir up de air whilst he is in dere” (*Their Eyes* 24), Janie tearfully tells Nanny.

Waiting for a while with flickering hopes for “a bloom time, and a green time and an orange time” to come in her marriage, Janie finally realizes that love and marriage are not identical and that she should not expect marriage to automatically create love. After gaining this knowledge she “look[s] up the road towards way off.” This metaphor of looking way

off implies that Janie is not discouraged by this knowledge but rather takes it as a chance to look further into the unknown world. Janie's decision to stay hopeful about satisfying her desire in the future, instead of discouraging herself from having any hopes, hints at her self-generative power that enables her to begin and end her life journey. Indeed, her first journey is initiated while she looks further the road and spots Joe Starks. By persistently looking and longing, Janie gains the chance to be introduced into another world.

Janie is attracted to Joe's appearance in their first encounter. When looking up the road as usual, Janie hears whistling and it is the whistler's look that captures her attention:

It was a citified, stylish dressed man with his hat set at an angle that didn't belong in these parts. His coat was over his arm, but he didn't need it to represent his clothes. The shirt with the silk sleeveholders was dazzling enough for the world. 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. Where would such a man be coming from and where was he going? (*Their Eyes* 27)

Joe's outer appearance is described in detail through Janie's eyes. Janie examines him from his head to his gait, feeling intrigued by his look which

is everything contrary to the mule-footed Logan. Joe's stylish and high quality clothes also rekindle Janie's yearning for another world and life, as they do not seem to "belong in these parts."

After closely examining his looks Janie concludes that "he acted like Mr. Washburn or somebody like that" (*Their Eyes* 27). Here, Janie's sight identifies in Joe his yearning to become an influential figure in an all-black town, to obtain power as he reveals his ultimate goal to become a "big voice" (28). Not only does Janie see this yearning for power in Joe, but her sight also registers him as a representation of horizon instead of bee and blooming trees. Horizon implies new life and changes, but it does not include bees and blossoms as later seen in Janie and Joe's marriage. After their first encounter they continue to meet every day, and Joe persuades Janie to come to Eatonville with him, stressing the benefits she would reap as soon as he becomes "a big ruler of things." However, Janie is not easily moved by his alluring words because of what she sees in him: "Janie pulled back a long time because he did not represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees, but he spoke for far horizon. He spoke for change and chance" (29). In Janie's insightful eyes, Joe is not visualized as a figure vivifying her dream of "sun-up and pollen and blooming trees," which is why she hesitates before taking his offer immediately. Indeed, Joe soon figures himself as a domineering oppressor who nevertheless brings changes

into her life by taking her to Eatonville and helping Janie escape the dull life with Logan.

Then, when Logan threatens to kill her with an ax for talking back to him Janie leaves the place immediately, joining Joe on the road. By untying the apron from her waist, Janie symbolically frees herself from what has been holding her back to the lonesome place: “She untied [the apron] and flung it on a low bush beside the road and walked on, picking flowers and making a bouquet” (*Their Eyes* 32). Her greatest mistake in departing with Joe, however, is that she neglects the warning that her sight previously gives her, that Joe does not represent the “sun-up and pollen and blooming trees” (29). Janie convinces herself that Joe would help her actualize the dream of having an ideal husband: “From now on until death she was going to have flower dust and springtime sprinkled over everything. A bee for her bloom” (32). Janie’s determination “to have flower dust and springtime sprinkled over everything” is thwarted as she begins her life with Joe.

As soon as the couple arrives in Eatonville Joe builds it into a proper town by buying up two hundred acres of land and setting up a post office and a store. As he builds up his prominence as Mr. Mayor in the town, he forbids Janie from speaking in public, strictly constricting her space within the house and the store where she cannot have any social contact with the townspeople. The significant moment that Janie senses the failure of her second marriage takes place when the villagers ask for a word from

Janie after Joe is elected as the town's mayor. At this moment Joe publicly silences Janie's voice and his words suddenly disillusion Janie:

“Thank you fuh yo’ compliments, but mah wife don’t know nothin’ ’bout not speech-makin’. *Ah never married her for nothin’ lak dat. She’s uh woman and her place is in de home.*”

Janie made her face laugh after a short pause, but it wasn't too easy. She had never thought of making a speech, and didn't know if she cared to make one at all. *It must have been the way Joe spoke out without giving her a chance to say anything one way or another that took the bloom off of things.* But anyway, she went down the road behind him that night feeling cold. (*Their Eyes* 43; emphasis added)

The image of the fallen bloom foretells their insipid future marriage in decades. When Joe says “[him being a big voice] makes uh big woman outa [Janie],” Janie feels a familiar loneliness that she used to feel in her life with Logan: “A feeling of coldness and fear took hold of her. She felt far away from things and lonely” (46).

Out of excessive possessiveness Joe alienates Janie from the townsfolk by forbidding her from engaging in town activities. One form of this social marginalization is silencing her voice. She has to keep her voice

down both in the public and private realm: “[Joe] wanted her submission and he’d keep on fighting until he felt he had it” (*Their Eyes* 71). In Eatonville where the commonest cultural practice is to play “lying games” and show off the participants’ verbal competence, Joe forbids Janie from partaking in, let alone listening to, the communal talk. The narrator explains the character of their talk:

The store itself was a pleasant place if only she didn’t have to sell things. When the people sat around on the porch and passed around the pictures of their thoughts for the others to look at and see, it was nice. The fact that the thought pictures were always crayon enlargements of life made it even nicer to listen to. (*Their Eyes* 51)

The visual metaphors that Hurston employs to describe the porch talk underline the relation between seeing and talking in black culture. Hurston writes in “Characteristics of Negro Expression” that “the white man thinks in a written language and the Negro thinks in hieroglyphics” (24), alluding to the close association of black oral culture with pictorial language. As such, in Eatonville the speakers’ performance is explained as “pass[ing] around the pictures of their thoughts,” which are for others “to look at and see.” In this visual language, Hurston emphasizes the relation between the verbal and visual expression, which is later observed in Janie’s articulation of her “oppositional gaze.”

What is further worth noting about the porch is that only men are the participants of the porch talk. The village men such as Lige, Sam, or Walter are the only “big picture talkers” whereas none of the female names appears (*Their Eyes* 54). Presenting only male talkers in the porch activity, Hurston indirectly criticizes the male-centeredness of the black oral culture. When the female villagers appear in the lying sessions, they are either the object of men’s sexual desires or of their misogynistic talks. The women never become the subject of such acts but remain as the sexualized objects. The men display their verbal agility before women and flatter their beauty as a way of “acting-out courtship” (67). When a more beautiful woman appears, the men immediately focus all of their attention on the most beautiful woman among the group and play out their courtship, telling her what they could buy for her. In this sense, they turn the sexually appealing woman into an object in the store, her body purchasable with money. On the other hand, when they are not engaged in the courtship play, the men’s talk becomes misogynistic. Unaware of the problem of their talk, they freely discuss killing their wife “cemetery dead” would she embarrass them in the public (74). In such male-dominant social setting where only men become the “big picture talkers,” Joe’s enforcement of silencing Janie is not considered problematic among the male villagers. Although the town men know that the way Joe treats Janie is “ungodly,” they simply think that the couple must understand one another: “De way he [Joe] rears and pitches in de store

sometimes when she [Janie] make uh mistake is sort of ungodly, but she don't seem to mind at all. Reckon dey understand one 'nother" (*Their Eyes* 50), one of the village men concludes.

Because Joe is the most influential man in the town, his wife Janie suffers the most from his obsession with power. Finally, when Joe violently wields his patriarchal power by beating Janie for an unsatisfying meal, Janie experiences a major epiphany—the epiphany rich with visual metaphors and imagery. In this moment, the act of visualizing her inner state makes Janie realize her true feelings about Joe, the result of which paves the way for Tea Cake to come into her life. Joe storms out the kitchen after hitting Janie:

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 down and shattered.* *But looking at it she saw that it never was the flesh and blood figure of her dreams.* Just something she had grabbed up to drape her dreams over. *In a way she turned her back upon the image where it lay and looked further.* She had no more blossomy openings dusting pollen over her man, neither any glistening young fruit where the petals used to be. She found that she had a host of thoughts she had never expressed to him,

and numerous
about. Things
heart where he
up feelings for
*an inside and an
not to mix them.*

emotions she had never let Jody know
packed up and put away in parts of her
could never find them. She was saving
some man she had never seen. *She had
outside now and suddenly she knew how
(Their Eyes 72; emphasis added)*

This passage depicts one of the most significant moments in the novel. First, it signifies the spiritual end of her second marriage. Janie realizes that Joe has never been her dream man from the beginning. Although she has instinctively known that Joe is a man who could show her far horizons but never become her bee-man, only now does she face and accept the truth about his fake image over which she has cast her dreams.

Furthermore, Janie becomes able to strategically make use of her two selves from this epiphanic moment—the inner self for introspection and self-growth, and the outer self for outward presentation and the protection of the inner self. Janie’s self-division is crucial in the process of self-growth for it earns her time and space to focus on her inner self. This is a survival strategy that Janie naturally comes up with in order to protect herself from Joe’s attempt to have complete ownership of his wife. By sending her “shadow” (*Their Eyes* 77)—which, ironically, indicates her real body—to the external events, she becomes able to channel all her energy into seeking what she truly desires. Janie’s self-division indicates mastery of self-control

rather than fragmented identity; she controls herself so adeptly that she can divide herself in two and unite them back into one at her will. In this sense, the crucial understanding she gains from visualizing her internal state not only leads her to the major epiphany after Joe's beating but also to the growth of her selfhood.⁵

Importantly, after being able to divide herself, Janie develops her sight into "the oppositional gaze." As briefly explained earlier, hooks claims that there is a will to resist in black people's act of looking (back). This will is intensified when their rights to look are denied by whites who regard the black people's looking back as a way of defying the dominant order. hooks writes: "That all attempts to repress our/black peoples' right to gaze had produced in us an overwhelming longing to look, a rebellious desire, an oppositional gaze" (116). She claims that this idea of "the oppositional gaze" represents black people's determination to critically see and analyze their own images in the popular media. Stressing the power in looking, hooks writes that the critical black spectators of the American media analyze the

⁵ In her essay "Metaphor, Metonymy, and Voice in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*" included in the collection of her essays, Barbara Johnson concentrates on the different plays of metaphors and metonymies in the scene of Janie's self-division. As one example, Johnson explains that Jody's image in Janie's visionary seeing proves to have never been a metaphor but a metonymy as it lacks resemblance to Janie's dream figure: "Jody's image is broken and reveals itself never to have been a metaphor, but only a metonymy of Janie's dream." Moreover, pointing out this moment as one from which Janie begins to speak, Johnson foregrounds the importance of Janie's self-division as "[her] acquisition of the power of voice thus grows . . . out of her division into inside and outside" (163).

racist images and even gain pleasures in doing so, instead of uncritically accepting the popular portrayals of themselves. Of these critical viewers, hooks focuses on black female spectators. Black female spectators refuse to identify themselves with neither the white feminists nor the black male scholarship. They resist conforming to the dominant ways of looking, and their refusal can exert real life influence as a political agent, hooks claims: “Critical black female spectatorship emerges as a site of resistance only when individual black women actively resist the imposition of dominant ways of knowing and looking” (128). Because these “dominant ways of knowing and looking” make black women form negative self-images, black female spectators keep their critical view of their media representation with keen agility.

In a similar vein, Hortense J. Spillers in her essay “Interstices: A Small Drama of Words” stresses black women’s power in returning the gaze of the oppressor. Spillers rejects the concept in which the White Father is safely secured in the omnipotent power, leaving no room for agency of black Americans, let alone the possibility of being perceived as a human being. Spillers’s argument bears resemblance with hooks’s in the sense that they both acknowledge the space for resistant agency of the oppressed with visual tropes. Spillers writes: “The subject is certainly seen, but she also sees. It is this return of the gaze that negotiates at every point a space for living, and it is the latter that we must willingly name the counter-power, the

counter-mythology” (“Interstices” 163). Although the ways the critics term the black women’s power of looking back are varying—hooks “the oppositional gaze” and Spillers “the counter-power, the counter-mythology”—they both acknowledge the resistant agency of black women in the act of looking.

Paula Amad’s discussion of the return of the gaze is also useful in understanding the meaning of black female spectators’ and Janie’s gaze. In her essay “Visual Riposte: Looking Back at the Return of the Gaze as Postcolonial Theory’s Gift to Film Studies,” Amad presents a critical view of the postcolonial and cinematic studies’ focus on exploring the moment of looking back of the filmed colonial objects in Western films. Amad calls such intense efforts of the studies “visual riposte,” which, as explained by the critic, “extends beyond formal or stylistic analysis to embody the author’s ethical intent to return, or at least to interrogate, the gaze” (52). Amad’s main focus in this essay is examining the historical and theoretical background of the colonial objects’ “return of the gaze.” According to the critic’s definition, it is the “look as a refusal of the assumed monolithic, unidirectionality of the West’s technologically mediated structures of looking at Cultural Others” (53). Claiming that the historical and theoretical focus on the return of the gaze is “overdue for sustained critical reconsideration” (52), the critic puts forth that “being the bearer rather than object of the gaze does not necessarily ensure the end of oppressive power

structure” (63). In other words, the mere reversal of the position of seeing and being seen cannot be automatically translated into significant and essential subversion of power in the dominant order of power.

Nonetheless, to borrow Wheeler Winston Dixon’s words, “This ‘gaze of the screen,’ or ‘look back,’ has the power to transform our existences, to substantially change our view of our lives, and of the world we inhabit” (7). Likewise, the act of looking back opens up the political space for the seen object to expand his/her possibilities to change the dominant order. In this sense, hooks’s discussion of black female spectators and their “oppositional gaze” is a useful theoretical frame in which Janie can be understood as a black woman with her own “oppositional gaze.” The gaze of black female spectators in hooks’s essay and of Janie in *Their Eyes* are not identical, for the primary objects of their gaze are different: the former look at their own distorted images in the films and TV shows and the latter look at the body of the perpetrator of patriarchal oppression. That is, whereas the black female spectators analyze the filmic product of the oppressive system of American sexism and racism, Janie analyzes Joe’s body which represents patriarchal oppression. Although the two agents’ gaze show difference in terms of the primary object of their gaze, however, the fact that they both exercise the power of looking in protecting and affirming their selfhood shows similarity in their acts. Furthermore, within the black female spectators’ and Janie’s gaze is included the capacity to define

themselves in their own terms while defying the negative representations of their bodies imposed from the outside. As the black female spectators silently jeer at the misrepresentations of their bodies while watching popular media products, Janie too denies to accept the body images that Joe intentionally forge and force others and herself to understand as truth.

As a person who has “the ability to manipulate one’s gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it” (hooks 116), Janie apprehends Joe’s attempt to defeminize her by exaggerating the agedness of her body. Closely examining Joe with her “oppositional gaze,” Janie gains a major epiphany:

One day she noticed that Joe didn’t sit down. He just stood in front of a chair and fell in it. Joe wasn’t so young as he used to be. *There was already something dead about him.* He didn’t rear back in his knees any longer. He squatted over his ankles when he walked. That stillness at the back of his neck. His prosperous-looking belly that used to thrust out so pugnaciously and intimidate folks, sagged like a load suspended from his loins. It didn’t seem to be a part of him anymore. Eyes a little absent too *...For the first time she could see a man’s head naked of its skull. Saw the cunning thoughts race in and out through the caves and promontories*

influence on Joe's domination through articulating her gaze. In this sense, it is the power of her "oppositional gaze" which eventually enables her voice to squarely and publicly stand against Joe's verbal abuse.

When Janie makes a minor mistake in the store, Joe starts speaking spitefully about her aged body image: "I god almighty! A woman stay round uh store till she get old as Methusalem and still can't cut a little thing like a plug of tobacco! Don't stand dere rollin' yo' pop eyes at me wid yo' rump hangin' nearly to yo' knees!" (*Their Eyes* 78). Upon this comment, Janie takes the middle of the floor and verbally attacks him, which was "something that hadn't been done before" in the town:

"Yeah, Ah'm nearly forty and you'se already fifty. How come you can't talk about dat sometimes instead of always pointin' at me?"

"T'ain't no use in getting' all mad, Janie, 'cause Ah mention you ain't no young gal no mo'. Nobody in heah ain't lookin' for no wife outa yuh. Old as you is."

"Naw, Ah ain't no young gal no mo' but den Ah ain't no old woman neither. Ah reckon Ah looks mah age too. But Ah'm uh woman every inch of me, and Ah know it. Dat's uh whole lot more'n *you* kin say. You big-bellies around here and put out a lot of brag, but 'tain't nothin' to it but yo' big voice. Humph! Talkin' 'bout *me* lookin' old!

When you pull down yo' britches, you look lak de
change uh life." (*Their Eyes* 79; emphasis original)

Upon Joe's attempt to berate her body images, Janie conversely demasculinizes him and even further feminizes him, "de change uh life" signifying women's menopause. Janie exposes to the public what Joe has cloaked under his wealth and power—his big bellies with nothing but his big voice, and "de change uh life" in his britches—and lets every villager see his defects. Also worth noting is Janie's confident words in defining herself. She confidently declares that she is "uh woman every inch" and that she knows it, her own words representing herself. She reveals acute sense of self-awareness and -appreciation as she "knows" and validates her womanhood.

One of the townsmen's comment right after Janie's verbal attack is worth noting. Walter taunts Joe who stutteringly asks Janie what she said: "You [Joe] heard her [Janie], you ain't blind" (*Their Eyes* 79). His comment insinuates that Janie for the first time publicly reveals her competence as one of the "big picture talkers" in the town (54), which proves powerful as shown in Joe's successive death. Soon revealed is the fatal impact of Janie's words on Joe. Joe realizes that "Janie had robbed him of his illusion of irresistible maleness that all men cherish" (79), and how his "impotent" life would unravel thereafter: "Raggedy-behind squirts of sixteen and seventeen would be giving him their merciless pity out of their eyes while their mouths

said something humble” (80). Although the villagers may express admiration through their mouth, they would not hide the contempt for the old man in their eyes. In this sense, the townspeople’s visual analysis is underlined with more honesty and truthfulness than the verbal expression.

Thus severely wounded by Janie’s counterattack, Joe takes to his bed and bans her visit to the sickroom. Despite his efforts to keep his control over Janie, the doctor announces that Joe’s death is only a matter of time due to his failed kidneys. After hearing the news Janie goes into his room and tells him “you got tuh die, and yuh can’t live.” Upon hearing these words confirming, if not inviting, his death, Joe exclaims for the last time and dies: “All dis tearin’ down talk!” Jody whispered with sweat globules forming all over his face and arms. “Git outa heah!” (*Their Eyes* 87). That Janie announces Joe’s death in front of his face is worth noting. It indicates that she has not stayed as an oppressed and silenced object throughout the marriage but silently cultivated her selfhood, grown strong enough to declare her husband’s death even before he dies. Janie’s words, “yuh got tuh die, and yuh can’t live,” prove that she has the power to actualize what she says, thus quickening Joe’s death.

Before informing the villagers of Joe’s death, what Janie does in the room is significant in relation to her gaze. Right after he dies Janie examines his face for a long time: “Janie gave [his hands] peace on his breast, then she studied his dead face for a long time” (*Their Eyes* 87). The

understanding she gains after this close examination is worth noting. From Joe's dead face Janie reads the extra hardships he must have gone through to acquire power as a black man in the racist society. "She was full of pity for the first time in years...She thought back and forth about what had happened in the making of a voice out of a man" (86). In this sense, Janie's gaze goes through another stage of maturation, enabling her to understand for the first time how Joe as a black man must have endeavored to actualize his dream of being a "big voice." Learning to embrace and understand even the life of her oppressor, Janie achieves a more complete sense of self.

Furthermore, Janie examines herself by looking at the mirror right after Joe's death. She takes a good look at herself in the mirror, affirming herself with her own eyes. After reflecting on Joe's life, Janie reflects on her own life and remembers the time when she "had told her girl self to wait for her in the looking glass":

She went over to the dresser and looked hard at her skin and features. The young girl was gone, but a handsome woman had taken her place. She tore off the kerchief from her head and let 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. (*Their Eyes* 87)

The means with which Janie affirms the spiritual growth of herself is her gaze. She silently gazes at the mirror and realizes that although her girl self is gone a full-grown woman has replaced the place. The act of looking at herself in the mirror is symbolic as it signifies that she can confidently look into herself and accept who she is. Letting down her plentiful hair from the head rag, Janie affirms her grown selfhood and fully enjoys her “glory.”

Likewise, Janie becomes a subject with “the oppositional gaze” during her marriage with Joe. What should be noted here is that her determination to experience sexual fulfillment in marriage makes her keep searching for her “bee-man.” That is, the sexual desires that Janie preserves within herself drive her to keep looking for another man with whom she could actualize her dream—the dream of living a sexually fulfilled life. As shown earlier, after having the epiphany about their marriage when Joe beats her, Janie “sav[es] up feelings for some man she had never seen” (*Their Eyes* 72). These “saved up feelings” encourage her to keep her inner self intact until she meets her “bee-man” in the future.

In the next chapter, I will discuss Janie’s life with her third husband Vergible Tea Cake Woods, the marriage during which she satiates her sexual desires and partakes in the communal celebration of black working class culture. In addition to becoming a gazing subject in her life with Joe Starks, Janie builds herself into an erotic subject in the brief yet passionate marriage to Tea Cake. I argue that the experiences, ranging from

the cultural to the sexual, complete Janie's identity as an erotic being and renders her life journey more meaningful in the sense that she succeeds to have cultural and communal knowledge and experience. I borrow Audre Lorde's idea of black women's "power of the erotic" in discussing Janie as an erotic being. As Lorde highlights the vast range of feelings that the erotic yields to black women, Janie experiences various feelings in her pursuit of the sexual experience and satisfaction. Examining the abrupt end of the couple's love, I will account for Tea Cake's internalized racism as the main cause of his abusive use of Janie's feelings which discolors their erotic love.

III. Exploring Desires: Janie with “the Power of the Erotic”

“Ah [Janie] wants to want him [Logan Killicks]
sometimes. Ah don’t want him to do all de wantin’.”

(Their Eyes 23)

Sobbing before her grandmother, Janie frustratingly expresses her yearning for sexual autonomy. She rejects always being objectified by her husband’s sexual needs, laying bare the desire to be the subject of the act of “wanting.” After going through two loveless marriages with Logan Killicks and Joe Starks, Janie is finally given a chance to “do all de wantin” in her third marriage to Vergible Tea Cake Woods (*Their Eyes 23*). Tea Cake values and shares Janie’s longing for sexual experience, and his understanding lends her chance to absorb varying knowledge and experience in Everglades, all of which are essential to composing herself as the erotic subject.

Janie’s sexual exploration is made possible by her lifelong devotion to the erotic cause. Tea Cake enables Janie to experience both the beginning and end of their erotic love and to navigate variety of feelings which are, according to Audre Lorde, cardinal in composing and valorizing one’s erotic being. This chapter examines the establishment of Janie’s identity as an erotic being, mainly during her life with Tea Cake. Taking

Audre Lorde's emphasis on "the power of the erotic" of black women, I analyze Janie as a black woman who believes in the potentials of the erotic and, accordingly, maintains an erotic life with her lover Tea Cake. Although Tea Cake resorts to violence and consequently fails to accompany Janie till the end of her journey, I argue that Janie's strength as an erotic subject nevertheless enables her to preserve their loving moments and to validate herself as a black female survivor.

At the core of my examination of Janie as an erotic being is Lorde's notion of black women's "power of the erotic." As many critics have noted, Janie's journey is often characterized by the extent to which she explores the possibilities of life granted by her unyielding pursuit of sexuality.⁶ In the same yet more extended vein, Lorde's concept of the erotic is crucial for comprehending Janie's achievement. As I will further expand in this chapter, Lorde emphatically adds the realm of feelings to that of the sexual, and thus completes her notion of the erotic; in this sense, not only physical sensuality but emotional connection between the sharers of sexual joy is included in the idea of the erotic. In her essay "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," Lorde expounds on this concept of the erotic, asserting that it is the source of power of black women, the empowering influence of which has been historically and socially negated and

⁶ It has been frequently pointed out that the pear tree scene defines Janie's individuality in terms of sexuality. See DuCille 116; Weir-Solely 43; Hemenway 233-34; Christian 59-60; Davies 150-51; Peters 130-31.

undervalued. She further argues that the erotic must be recognized as a great source of knowledge, as a means through which black women can practice self-acceptance and gain genuine understanding of others.

I argue that Janie is a character who prefigures and brings Lorde's idea of black women's erotic into life, a character whose unabashed sexual desires set her as "her own woman" as aptly described by her friend Pheoby (*Their Eyes* 111). Through Pheoby's words Hurston alludes to Janie's self-defining personality formed by her belief in and pursuit of the erotic. Reading Janie as a black woman fully exercising and endorsing the erotic power, I argue that her marriage to Tea Cake enables her to become an erotic subject whose desire for erotic experience is satisfied at last—"one of the sexist, most 'healthily' rendered heterosexual love stories in [African American] literature" as Alice Walker puts it ("Zora Neale Hurston" 17).

To be certain, the authenticity of Janie's spiritual growth as a gazing subject is already affirmed by herself even before meeting Tea Cake. To this personal dimension of Janie's self-realization, Hurston adds the social and communal meaning in order to complete the character's identity. That is, Hurston highlights the significance of black folk tradition throughout the novel and sheds light on what being culturally interactive means to Janie who has been socially severed from her people. In her book *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Patricia Hill Collins writes that "the connectedness among

individuals provides Black women deeper, more meaningful self-definitions” (113). In this statement, Collins underscores the significance of black community—whether familial or cultural—in enriching the meaning of black women’s self-definitions. Importantly, Collins’s words ring in tune with Lorde’s concept of the erotic in that the erotic enables black women to achieve this “connectedness” that endows their self-definition with a deeper meaning. In this light, the feelings of belonging and exaltation from interacting with the muck people compositely make up Janie’s identity as an erotic being, combined with the uninhibited exploration of sexual joys in her relationship with Tea Cake.

In my discussion of the way Hurston artfully handles the dynamics of the couple’s love, Tracy L. Bealer’s essay particularly comes in use. In her analysis of Tea Cake in “‘The Kiss of Memory’: The Problem of Love in Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*,” Bealer notes Hurston’s social critique in the novel. While building on Bealer’s reading of the novel as Hurston’s fictional representation of the racist and sexist American society, I further suggest that the text ultimately reflects Hurston’s determination to affirm Janie as an autonomous erotic subject, the point on which I depart from Bealer’s argument on Hurston “gently but persistently signifying on Janie’s editorializing of Tea Cake” (324). By “Janie’s editorializing of Tea Cake,” Bealer refers to Janie’s choice to preserve only the good memories of Tea Cake as her ideal lover. The critic then concludes

that the ideal relationship shared by Janie and Tea Cake is destroyed by Tea Cake's internalized racism.

In attempts to depart from Bealer's argument on the ultimate destruction of the couple's love, I will argue that the reason Hurston emphatically describes and introduces Janie into the novel as one of the women who "forget all those things they don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget" (*Their Eyes* 1), is to insinuate that the couple's love is kept intact by Janie's deliberate selection of memories—the same reason for which the narrator at the end of the novel affirmatively reveals Janie's consciousness that "[Tea Cake] could never be dead until [Janie] herself had finished feeling and thinking" (*Their Eyes* 193). In this vein, whereas Bealer critically views the function of Janie's selective memory as the novel's alarm to the reader "to be wary of the truth-value of Janie's memory" (Bealer 324), I see it as Hurston's attempt to validate the survival of Janie and Tea Cake's love, as ensured by Janie's promise—rich in metaphorical meaning—that she would continue planting the seeds that Tea Cake left behind: "[Janie] had noticed [the garden seeds] on the kitchen shelf when she came home from the funeral and had put them in her breast pocket. Now that she was home, she meant to plant them for remembrance" (*Their Eyes* 191). In this sense, I argue that Hurston does not direct her critique at heterosexual love itself but at the white-supremacist

and masculinist ideologies of the era as the main determinant that separates the lovers.

Then, first, it is important to examine the erotic connection between Janie and Tea Cake and to understand Hurston's attempt to prove to the American readership that such an ideal heterosexual relationship among black Americans exists. That Hurston was deeply concerned with the racist and pornographic images of black people in her time is explicitly shown in her essay "What White Publishers Won't Print" published in 1950.⁷ She begins by accusing the white public of their lack of curiosity about the ordinary life of black people and of ethnic minorities in general. Stating that "mere difference is apt to connote something malign," Hurston accuses the American public of their indifference to the quotidian life of black people, the result of which makes the publishers "shy away from romantic stories about Negroes and Jews . . . unless the story or play involves racial tension" ("White Publishers" 170). Because the white majority cannot possibly conceive of blacks having the same thoughts and feelings with themselves, the essential "difference" between the races that the white presuppose is left unresolved. The writer then urges that the public realize that "the minorities

⁷ The pornographic images of black women in American society go back as early as to the sixteenth century when European colonization of African continent initiated. For the main reasons behind Westerners' persistent efforts in myth-making, see Nagel (96). For more information about the socio-historical association between black women and hyper-sexuality, see McDaniels-Wilson 194; Collins 56; White 29.

do think, and think about something other than the race problem” and that “a Negro experienc[es] *a deep and abiding love* and not just the passion of sex” (“White Publishers” 171; emphasis added).

Hurston also speaks strongly against “the folklore of ‘reversion to type,’” according to which a black person, regardless of his/her intellectual level or economic status, is believed to revert to racial stereotypes. Hurston half-bitterly notes the popular belief: “No matter how high we may *seem* to climb, put us under strain and we revert to type, that is, to the bush” (“White Publishers” 172; emphasis original). It is Hurston’s assertion that this widespread belief in black people’s tendency to revert to their “origin” hinders the white majority from believing, let alone imagining, that blacks are capable of “a deep and abiding love” (“White Publishers” 171). By “a deep and abiding love,” Hurston refers to the one that she herself portrayed in *Their Eyes* more than a decade prior to writing this essay. In this regard, the comment that Hurston further makes on black people’s love resounds with deeper meaning: “[blacks] can and do experience discovery of the numerous subtle faces as a foundation for a great and selfless love, and the diverse nuances that go to destroy that love as with others” (“White Publishers” 172). In *Their Eyes* Hurston succeeds to portray both the “great and selfless love” and “the diverse nuances that go to destroy that love” in her careful delineation of Janie and Tea Cake’s marriage. To put more precisely, although Janie and Tea Cake’s “great and selfless love” might

appear destroyed by “the diverse nuances” of racism of the era, Hurston preserves the essence of their love within Janie whose strength as an erotic subject keeps it intact in her carefully selected memories.

Janie’s identity as an erotic subject is essential to both the survival of her own and of the couple’s love. Although Tea Cake ultimately dies in the novel, the love he shares with Janie “lives” with her eternally. As noted earlier, I take Audre Lorde’s definition of the erotic in discussing Janie as a woman exercising “the power of the erotic.” Lorde foregrounds the yet unacknowledged potential of the erotic as a great replenishing source of power of black women, the power with which they could gain better understanding of themselves and others. What lies at the heart of Lorde’s argument is her recognition and redefinition of the erotic as rooted in “a deeply female and spiritual plane” (“Use of the Erotic” 53), the proper celebration of which can generate pure joy among the sharers.

Lorde begins her essay by noting the oppression of the male- and West-dominant world on black women’s sexuality. Expounding on how the erotic has been identified as “a sign of female inferiority,” if not negated by its very existence, Lorde asserts that such suppression conversely proves the potentiality of the erotic as a “source of power and information within [black women’s] lives” (“Uses of the Erotic” 53), once acknowledged by black women. Lorde draws a clear distinction between the erotic and the pornographic, designating the latter as diametrically opposite to the former.

This distinction is crucial in respect to the accusations that yoked black women under libidinousness and sending sexual invitations to white men. Whereas the erotic is characterized as generating expansive scope of feelings, the pornographic aspires to the contrary and “represents the suppression of true feeling” (“Uses of the Erotic” 54). According to Lorde, not only does the sense of self-approval render the erotic so powerful, but the self-respect required in pursuing and believing in the erotic colors the lives of black women with a new meaning which helps them cast off the feelings of self-negation.

What Lorde credits as the function of the erotic is also worth noting. There are mainly two functions of the erotic that can potentially enrich the lives of black women. The first is “providing the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person,” and the second is “the open and fearless underlining of [black women’s] capacity for joy” (“Uses of the Erotic” 56). In other words, the sharing of joy and of self-connectedness with another individual(s) are the key positive roles that the erotic plays in black women’s lives. Underlining the importance of “understanding” accompanied by the knowledge of the erotic, Lorde maintains that the erotic not only enables one to deeply connect with and acquire the deepest knowledge of herself, but to better understand and appreciate another human being engaged in sharing the joy of the erotic.

Furthermore, Lorde denies both dichotomies commonly associated with the erotic of black women—one between the spiritual and the erotic and another between the spiritual and the political. It has been often believed that the spiritual must be separately concerned from the erotic in order to avoid degrading the former's sacredness. In turn, this tendency has associated the latter with any unspiritual and pornographically sensual ideas and images. Similarly, the spiritual and the political have been believed to exist in two incompatible realms, respectively in the sacred and the secular. However, Lorde deconstructs the old dichotomies and redefines the scope of the erotic, combining it with the spiritual and the political. Lorde urges black women that they rightly acknowledge and accept the erotic as a force which could have political significance in their life, powerful enough to bring about real life changes: "Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives" ("Uses of the Erotic" 57). The erotic is not to be considered only as an ideological concept irrelevant to living but as a real source of knowledge and belief through which everyday can be lived. Ending her essay with a powerful statement, "[r]ecognizing the power of the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world, rather than merely settling for a shift of characters in the same weary drama" ("Uses of the Erotic" 59), Lorde transforms the

idea of the erotic from the historically acknowledged source of pain to the source of limitless power from which black women can practice self-acceptance and gain profound knowledge and understanding of each other.

Reading *Their Eyes* in accord with Lorde's belief in the erotic, I identify Janie as "the woman who does not fear [the erotic's] revelation, nor succumb to the belief that sensation is enough," a woman to whom, in turn, "the erotic offers a well of replenishing and provocative force" ("Uses of the Erotic" 54). A passage from Lorde's essay is conducive to comprehending Janie as an erotic subject:

The erotic is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings. It is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire. For having experienced the fullness of this depth of feeling and recognizing its power, in honor and self-respect we can require no less of ourselves. (Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic" 54)

According to Lorde's definition, the erotic is a measurement of feelings. Its wide range of emotions stretches from the budding sense of one's self to the explosion of strong feelings. It is important to point out that the beginning stage of the erotic emotion is becoming aware of one's sense of self, the equivalent of which I see as the self-consciousness that Janie acquires at the

crucial moment under the pear tree. Being aware of her desires that become the staple of her life thereafter, Janie tastes joy of self-awareness, preparing herself to become an erotic subject. Thus thrust into the world full of feelings, later in her marriage with Tea Cake Janie gains the experience of having been to both ends of the emotional spectrum set by the erotic from the ecstasies and feelings of appreciation to “the meanest moment of eternity” caused by Tea Cake’s death (*Their Eyes* 184).

Janie’s erotic journey begins in Nanny’s backyard. The scene that reveals Janie’s yearning for erotic consummation of love is when she is awakened to sexual desires for the first time under the pear tree. Beside the apparently sexual tone and visual imagery of the scene, alluding to Janie’s indirectly experienced orgasm from merely looking at the blossoms (“She had been summoned to behold a revelation. Then Janie felt a pain remorseless sweet that left her limp and languid”; *Their Eyes* 11), that Janie conceives at the moment only the very union of the bee and the blossom, instead of the “result” of the union which automatically translates into bearing children, is worth noting. Certainly, the pollination of the two natural objects is a traditional trope for procreation in heterosexual relationship. Nevertheless, Janie does not perceive the moment as a potential moment for future reproduction but only as the most desirable erotic conjunction, which I see as Hurston’s deliberate and subtle effort to avoid erasing Janie’s individuality under the name of motherhood.

Concerned with the genealogy of black female writers, Patricia Felisa Barbeito offers a persuasive reading on Janie's childlessness in her essay "Making Generations' in Jacobs, Larson, and Hurston: A Genealogy of Black Women's Writing." It is the critic's argument that Janie "refuses to reproduce the female legacy described and embodied by her grandmother. The fact that she literally has no children translates metaphorically into her rejection of traditional, codified roles" (385). Arguing thus, Barbeito points to a different type of procreation that places Janie within the black female legacy; instead of bodily procreation, Janie reproduces "a great sermon" which Nanny could not preach due to the historical burdens (*Their Eyes* 16). That is, by being an articulate black female subject, Janie engages herself in a narrative procreation, rewriting and retelling the text that Nanny wants to pass down to her granddaughter (Nanny tells Janie that "[she]'d save de text for [Janie]"; *Their Eyes* 16). Donna Aza Weir-Solely also makes a similar observation that "Janie's barrenness facilitates free and unfettered sexual expressions. Liberated from the annexation to the conventional role of motherhood and the threat of unwanted pregnancy, Janie's sexuality renders her freer and happier, mimicking her state of orgasmic bliss under the pear tree in Nanny's yard when she was only sixteen" (58). Although I generally agree with Barbeito and Weir-Solely, I find that the word "barrenness" inadequately describes Janie's childlessness for the word indicates physical inability to produce offspring when applied to female sex. Janie's childless

state does not originate from her physical inability to bear children but rather is a result of Hurston's strategy to foreground Janie's individuality as an erotic subject. That Janie does not notice the apparent theme of procreation in the bee and the blossom's consummation implies that her sole interest lies exclusively in the consummation of love itself. Because Janie succeeds to have this ideal relationship with her third husband, the experiences she gains during her life with Tea Cake possess greater meaning.

In regards to Janie's marital life with Tea Cake, some critics maintain that Janie limits herself within the boundary of heterosexual marriage, which ultimately makes her docile to the husband's needs. Hortense J. Spillers writes in "A Hateful Passion, a Lost Love" that Janie's journey is founded upon a "male-centered yearning" (306), a phrase in which she criticizes the "male-centeredness" of Janie's lifelong desire. Ann duCille also comments on the "incomplete" victory of female subjectivity in the novel, putting forth that "[i]ndeed, *Their Eyes* critiques, challenges, and subverts male authority, ultimately eliminating the male oppressors, but female subjectivity does not win out over patriarchal ideology" (121). Stating thus, duCille evaluates Janie's transformation into an autonomous female subject as partially successful.

However, considering the disillusionment with marriage that Janie encounters in her first marriage, it is hard to read Janie as a woman confined within the system of marriage. Janie reaches beyond what is available

within the boundary of marriage in order to acquire self-knowledge indispensable for completing her spiritual growth. As pointed out earlier, the teenager Janie is brought before the harsh reality that “marriage did not make love,” the realization after which she grows from a girl to a woman: “Janie’s first dream was dead, so she became a woman” (*Their Eyes* 25). Being forced to enter womanhood, Janie realizes that what she must be *really* after in life is not the sociocultural approval, or promise, of a couple’s love—marriage—but the very consummation of love itself as she has observed in the natural union of a bee and a blossom under the pear tree: the pure union of natural objects devoid of societal contracts. That is, she comes to understand that she needs not name such consummation of love as “marriage” to prove its authenticity.

Furthermore, Janie’s response to Tea Cake’s presumed flight and betrayal right after their marriage proves that her primary concern is more with being in erotic love than maintaining marital state. On one morning after their wedding, Janie asks Tea Cake to go out and get something to cook for their late breakfast while she gets more sleep. A couple of hours later, Janie wakes up to find that not only Tea Cake is not back yet but the two hundred dollars in her purse safely pinned to the inner pocket of her clothes is gone. After a few futile attempts to remain calm, what crosses Janie’s mind is the much gossiped story of Annie Tyler who was widowed, like Janie herself, and was talked into selling all her properties by her much

younger lover Who Flung. Annie Tyler then left Eatonville with Who Flung and, as the byname of her lover insinuates, she returned home only a couple of weeks later, penniless and deserted by the young man.

Surprisingly, even while unconsciously comparing herself with Annie Tyler, what concerns Janie the most is neither her lost money, nor the fact that she is soon to be the prey of Eatonville people's ridicule and taunts. Instead, Janie wholeheartedly wishes that Tea Cake would be safe and that he would not "love" another woman beside herself:

But oh God, don't let Tea Cake be off somewhere hurt
and Ah not know nothing about it. And God, please suh,
don't let him love nobody else but me. Maybe Ah'm is
uh fool, Lawd, lak dey say, but Lawd, Ah been so
lonesome, and Ah been waitin', Jesus. Ah done waited
uh long time. (*Their Eyes* 120)

There are two interrelated points in this passage: the unexpected shift of narrative voice from the narrator's to Janie's, in terms of point of view and idiom, and the intensity of Janie's eagerness for consummated love. It is my argument that Hurston tactfully uses the narrative shift to underscore the gravity of Janie's yearning for true, erotic love.

That this is the only scene in which the narrator's voice is completely taken by Janie's makes it particularly meaningful. Although the narrator intimately shares and presents Janie's thoughts and consciousness

throughout the novel, as Henry Louis Gates Jr. points out, “[a]lmost never...does Janie’s free indirect discourse unfold in a *strictly black idiom*...rather, it is represented in an idiom informed by the black idiom but translated into what we might think of as a colloquial form of Standard English, which always stands in contrast to Janie’s direct speech, which is foregrounded in dialect” (“The Speakerly Text” 211; emphasis added). Although Gates insinuates that Janie’s free indirect discourse is never expressed in “a strictly black idiom” in the novel, the passage I quoted above is the only instance that Janie’s thoughts are delivered in her own dialect instead of the narrator’s Standard English. Then, one cannot but wonder the reason for Hurston’s deliberate choice of this moment as the only one in which Janie’s consciousness is expressed in her own language, without being mediated by the narrator’s, like other numerous instances in the novel.

It is my argument that Janie’s free indirect discourse reflects Hurston’s tactful strategy to foreground the significance and intensity of Janie’s yearning for love, the long-awaited and unsatiated yearning as captured in her silent cry to God: “but Lawd, Ah been so lonesome, and Ah been waitin’, Jesus” (*Their Eyes* 120). This imploration is so intense and laden with powerful emotions that it fully lays bare Janie’s old longing to the reader. Addressing this scene, Tracey L. Bealer contends that this moment features “how the possibility of love’s inefficacy is *also* preserved

in her psyche, along with her utopian memory of Erotic fulfillment” (321; emphasis original). However, taking into account the connection between the narrative change in this scene and Janie’s imploration, I argue that Hurston’s deliberate selection of this moment speaks strongly about the writer’s determination to stress the gravity of Janie’s yearning for love—the yearning that Hurston ensures be satisfied by the end of Janie’s journey.

To explore the relationship between Janie and Tea Cake in detail, it is necessary to look at some defining characteristics of their love. Tea Cake appears to be the ideal man with whom Janie can actualize her visions of love, without having to subdue herself as in her previous marriages. Although Tea Cake later comes to reveal patriarchal beliefs, he must be distinguished from Janie’s previous husbands for several reasons. First, his mobility as a working class black man frees Janie from the shackles of middle class status that used to bind her to the “high stool” on which Nanny wanted to see her granddaughter. Janie explains to Pheoby what marriage to Joe was like: “Ah got up on de high stool lak [Nanny] told me, but Pheoby, Ah done nearly languished tuh death up dere” (*Their Eyes* 114). Nanny’s slavery past leaves her with the only wish that her granddaughter would “take a stand on high ground” like white mistresses (16), revealing aspiration for the middle class values and economic comfort. However, Janie nearly “languished tuh death up dere” on the high chair as she frankly confides to Pheoby. Leon F. Litwack offers sociological studies about black

middle class men and women that succinctly capture Janie's sentiment in her words. In his book *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow*, Litwack writes: "[black middle class males] were expected to demonstrate manly virtues of physical prowess, leadership, and aggressiveness, while females were expected to be deferential, submissive, and dependent, and to be responsive at all times to the needs and demands of men" (342). Alluding to the middle class values which constrict women to the words of the patriarchs in the household, Hurston makes clear the contrast between Janie's first two husbands and Tea Cake in terms of mobility.

It is unequivocally implied throughout the novel that mobility is essential to Janie's survival. The narrator describes Janie's consciousness looking back on how Nanny altered her entire life path: "[Janie] had been getting ready for her great journey to the horizons in search of *people*; it was important to all the world that she should find them and they find her" (*Their Eyes* 89; emphasis original). The close association between Janie and mobility is also shown in the metaphors that Hurston employs to describe the influence of Nanny's "mislove" on her granddaughter (90). Although Janie finds a "jewel" within herself, she is divested of the chance to gleam it around due to Nanny's "mislove." Instead, Janie "had been set in the market-place to sell. Been set for still-bait" (90). The stillness implied in this metaphor is in direct contrast to the image that metaphorically depicts Janie

as a “mud-ball”: “Like all the other tumbling mud-balls, Janie had tried to show her shine” (90). These contrasting metaphors in terms of stillness and mobility become all the more apparent when assessing Janie’s husbands in this light.

Logan and Joe keep Janie extremely stationary and confine her space to the extent in which she remains within their sight at all times, making sure that they have control of her “body.” Logan’s place is not only distanced from the place where Nanny and the Washburns live but it is “a lonesome place like a stump in the middle of the woods where nobody had ever been,” the house completely “absent of flavor” (*Their Eyes* 21-22). As the image of a stump implies, Janie’s life with Logan is characterized as immobile. When Janie protests to working in the barn with him, Logan threateningly shouts out at her: “You ain’t got no particular place. It’s wherever Ah need yuh” (31). In his words Logan implies that Janie is only to remain in the place where he designates her being, without any specific place to call her own. Whereas Logan fails to hold Janie within his grasp for a long time, Joe turns out more insistent and repressive than Logan. The store tending chore that he assigns to Janie best captures her forced immobility. Certainly, Janie’s spirituality is not held down by Joe’s words. She develops her own means of protection of her selfhood, the “oppositional gaze,” which eventually defeats his oppression. In terms of her physicality, however, Janie is forced to literally sit on a high chair during the day and to

tend the store or the post office. Beaten down by the stationary and immobile life in Eatonville, Janie who used to see herself full of unexplored potentials turns into a woman “liv[ing] between her hat and her heels” (76). Despite her potency to explore the horizon, Janie is forced to appear only as a being defined by the outline of her physical features “between her hat and her heels,” her spiritual boundlessness unconcerned. In this sense, it is more than fitting that Janie is compared to a “rut in the road” in the novel, which is another metaphor that indicates her physical immobility: “Plenty of life beneath the surface but it was kept beaten down by the wheels” (76).

On the other hand, Janie lives a constantly moving life with Tea Cake without being tied down to limited places. Instead of restricting her mobility, Tea Cake ensures that she enjoys the same activities as he does, mostly outdoor and communal. Janie and Tea Cake’s first encounter at the store and their following conversation capture the gist of their relationship:

“You [Janie] oughta be at de next game. ’Tain’t no use
in you stayin’ heah if everybody else is gone. You don’t
buy from yo’self, do yuh?”

“You [Tea Cake] crazy thing! ’Course Ah don’t. But
Ah’m worried ’bout you uh little.”

“How come? ’Fraid Ah ain’t gointuh pay fuh dese
drinks?”

“Aw naw! How you gointuh git back home?”

“Wait round heah fuh a car. If none don’t come, Ah got good shoe leather. ’Tain’t but seben miles no how. Ah could walk dat in no time. Easy.”

“If it wuz me, Ah’d wait on uh train. Seben miles is uh kinda long walk.”

“It would be for you, ’cause you ain’t used to it. But Ah’m seen women walk further’n dat. You could too, if yuh had it tuh do.” (*Their Eyes* 97)

As if Janie has already known him for a long time (“[Janie] knew she didn’t know his name, but he looked familiar”; 94), she instantly feels familiar and becomes fond of him, as her affection is clearly present in their conversation. More importantly, Tea Cake suggests that Janie try living a more mobile life. Not only does he invite Janie “out” to go to the games but encourages her to walk long distance. Tea Cake’s words of encouragement are in contrast to the restrictive orders of Joe, who keeps Janie within the store and the house. As seen in the mule funeral scene in the novel, he does not allow Janie to attend the funeral, leaving her the only person in the town who misses the communal entertainment. As such, Tea Cake and Joe respectively represent in Janie’s life mobility and immobility.

Another defining aspect of their relationship is that Tea Cake offers Janie a chance to gain access to the culture of her people. Along with the sexually liberating experience with Tea Cake, Janie’s assimilation to the

muck culture and people is crucial to establishing her erotic being, for the new cultural knowledge and experience give her a chance to feel genuine joy in interacting with others. According to Lorde, the erotic must be understood as a comprehensive concept which embraces every aspect of life accompanied by intense feelings. Activities that underline the sensual and emotional can be “erotically satisfying experience, whether it is dancing, building a bookcase, writing a poem, examining an idea” (Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic” 56-57). To apply Lorde’s words to reading Janie, being connected to her folk and sharing of joy generated in communal activities help her become an erotic woman significantly. Lorde writes:

The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference. (“Uses of the Erotic” 56)

As earlier shown in the “tumbling mud-ball” metaphor used to describe Janie’s self-image, she understands her identity as unique and desires to interact with other “mud-balls” to whom she could “show her shine” (*Their Eyes* 90). It is part of Janie’s identity without which her journey is deemed less successful. Although Janie and the muck people have different economic and social status—Janie as a middle class woman with light skin tone and plentiful hair and the Everglades workers poor and dark-colored—

“the sharing of joy” generated in celebrating their culture paves the way for mutual understanding, and thus for lending Janie a chance to taste the feelings only accessible in cultural connection.

An emblematic figure of the Southern black working class, Tea Cake invites Janie to his community of which he consists an integral part, and contributes to making her gemlike personality known to its members through active engagement in the cultural activities. After the short yet fulfilling stay at Everglades Janie returns to Eatonville, content with the experience and knowledge accrued in her life at the muck. Ultimately, these hard-won lessons enable her to tell Pheoby that “you got tuh go there tuh know there” (*Their Eyes* 192; emphasis original), stressing the importance of having firsthand experience of life. Hurston thus completes establishing Janie as a realized black female subject by introducing Tea Cake in Janie’s life as a man who fills in Janie’s internal void of cultural connectedness.

Hurston makes it clear that one of the major themes of the novel is exploring the life of the “permanent transients” of Everglades (*Their Eyes* 131)—the likes of Tea Cake who compose Southern black working class. Whereas the Eatonville villagers have their own houses, though rented, and form a village where most of them settle down permanently, the muck people have no residence, never staying stationary in one place for long. Looking for farm or plantation works, they flow in and out of places, living by the money they earn from each seasonal work: “They made good money,

even to the children. So they spent good money. Next month, and next year were other times” (*Their Eyes* 132). Leon Litwack explains the muck people’s life style and motto: “Rejecting the static lives of their parents, almost always on the move, they felt freer than most, and prided themselves on being masterless, on being able to enjoy a freedom of movement and expression denied many of their people, on being free of a labor system that tied others (including their families) to the land through violence, coercion, and the law” (452). Although they have white bossmen in the fields who supervise their work, the black workers are “masterless” people who freely enjoy themselves after the day’s work, forming their own cultural community in which they exalt themselves with communal plays like tale-telling games, gambling, and singing and dancing.

Hurston describes them as “ugly from ignorance and broken from being poor” (*Their Eyes* 131). The reader can sense in her words the empathetic feelings that the writer holds to these people for their lack of education and poverty. As an anthropologist-cum-writer who was engaged in gathering black folk tales in the Southern states, Hurston delineates in detail the people of the muck and their way of living:

All night now the jooks clanged and clamored. Pianos living three lifetimes in one. Blues made and used right on the spot. Dancing, fighting, singing, crying, laughing, winning and losing love every hour. Work all day for

money, fight all night for love. The rich black earth
clinging to bodies and biting the skin like ants. (*Their
Eyes* 131)

It is important that Janie and Tea Cake's house becomes the hub of such muck parties. As a person who represents "no high mucky mucks" (124), as Tea Cake himself calls them, he is an indispensable figure in the muck culture: "Tea Cake's house was a magnet, the unauthorized center or the 'job.' The way he would sit in the doorway and play his guitar made people stop and listen and maybe disappoint the jook for that night" (132).⁸

Though not instantly, the muck people eventually accept Janie into their society. Certainly, one must not presume that Tea Cake's centrality in the muck culture automatically grants Janie with the same cultural importance. Due to Janie's middle class status, the Everglades people at first treat her with the prejudice that "she thought herself too good to work like the rest of the women" (*Their Eyes* 133). Nevertheless, Janie blends in as soon as she starts working in the field. When Janie first shows up at the bean

⁸ Litwack's explanation on the Southern jooks is helpful in understanding Janie and Tea Cake's house: "Some rural blacks turned their homes into 'clubs' on certain nights, selling homemade liquor and home-cooked food, and employing local musicians who performed 'jump-ups' and blues, intended for both dancing and listening. Known by various names, such places at some point would be dubbed 'juke houses' and 'juke joints'...(The term 'juke' has been traced to similar-sounding words in West African languages having to do with 'partying,' and to the Gullah 'joog,' which translated into 'disorderly' in the Georgia Sea Islands)" (451). Whether the origin of the word "jook" is "partying," or "disorderly," both words fit well into Hurston's description of the jook in Everglades.

field, “a suppressed murmur” arises amongst the workers. However, as she shows no signs of pomposity and genuinely enjoys the work, “all day long the romping and playing [Janie and Tea Cake] carried on behind the boss’s back made [Janie] popular right away. It got the whole field to playing off and on” (133).

Janie’s participation in the verbal plays amongst the workers, not only as a listener but as one of the players as well, also alludes to her genuine interaction with the Everglades folk. Indeed, Janie’s cultural participation has two significations. Undoubtedly, it is a great accomplishment to Janie who could not freely enjoy the villagers’ “pass[ing] around the pictures of their thoughts” due to Joe’s social alienation (*Their Eyes* 51). Moreover, Janie is the first female in the novel who partakes in the male-centered oral tradition of black community. As noted earlier, the black communities’ rituals of boasting each other’s verbal agility are masculinist practices from which women appear excluded in the novel. Both in Eatonville and Everglades, not a single black female verbal player is present in the scenes of verbal exchanges. From Sam, Lige, Walter in Eatonville to Sop de Bottom, Ed Dockery, and Bootyny in Everglades, all the participants in the verbal plays are identified as male, except for Janie. It is pleasantly narrated: “The men held big arguments [in Everglades] like they used to do on the store porch. Only here, she could listen and laugh and even talk some herself if she wanted to. She got so she could tell big stories herself from

listening to the rest” (134). Because Janie is a person of innate brilliance, who “knew things that nobody had ever told her” (25), she has no difficulty making up stories and displaying her brilliance when and where she is given a chance.

That Janie becomes a meaningful figure in the muck culture is further shown when she introduces non-black ethnic minority peoples into the black community. The Everglades community’s cultural embracement of the Bahamians reflects Janie’s social stance as one of its influential member, influential enough to widen the cultural boundaries of the community. What is worth noting is that Janie is the one who first notices the Bahamian drummers and bridges the cultural gap between the two different ethnic groups. In between the seasons when there is no labor, Janie notices the Bahamians whom she did not recognize before:

[D]uring the summer when she heard the subtle but compelling rhythms of the Bahaman drummers, she’d walk over and watch the dances. She did not laugh the “Saws” to scorn as she had heard the people doing in the season. She got to like it a lot and she and Tea Cake were on hand every night till the others teased them about it. (*Their Eyes* 139)

It is Janie who first notices and becomes fascinated by the Bahamians’ culture, which used to be a laughingstock of the Everglades workers.

Although the black American workers at first tease Janie and Tea Cake about befriending the “Saws,” who are an ethnic minority group in Everglades, they soon embrace the drummers and have lively cultural interactions: “Since Tea Cake and Janie had friended with the Bahaman workers in the ’Glades, they, the ‘Saws,’ had been gradually drawn into the American crowd” (154). This episode of the Bahamian workers’ inclusion in the black American culture not only gives a detail account of the ethnic diversity of Everglades but proves Janie and Tea Cake’s social position at the center of the muck society.⁹

Thus, Janie’s journey to Everglades and all the following experiences would have been impossible without Tea Cake who performs his role as a cultural mediator between Janie and the Everglades folk. However, as much as he contributes to enriching Janie’s journey, he is also a figure without whom Janie must finish her great journey. Although she means to lead a life of long lasting love by Tea Cake’s side at first, his

⁹ Martyn Bone’s essay “The (Extended) South of Black Folk: Intra-regional and Transnational Migrant Labor in *Jonah’s Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*” examines in detail the Bahamian drummers in *Their Eyes*, arguing against Hazel V. Carby that Hurston historicizes the intra-regional (within the Southern regions) and transnational (from Caribbean islands to U.S.) movements of labor in her novels. Bone points out how the transnational migrant workers in the South received little attentions both in real life and in the novel’s criticism: “The Caribbean migrants’ absence from the official history and death toll of the 1928 hurricane is eerily echoed by the lack of literary-critical attention to the Bahamian presence on the muck in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*” (768-69). Although Bone expresses skepticism about the true integration of the muck and the Bahamian culture, my focus is on underlining the crucial role that Janie plays in providing the space where the two cultures can meet, the point with which Bone is in accordance.

feelings of insecurity caused by internalized racism wrecks the couple's relationship, symbolically represented as Janie's killing of Tea Cake. Tea Cake resorts to and wields his patriarchal power when the anxieties stemming from class consciousness and intraracial colorism surface. Hurston thus shows both the great heterosexual love of black Americans and the destructiveness of the internalized racism powerful enough to ruin such a loving relationship.

Tea Cake's violence can be read along the line of Lorde's discussion of the erotic. That is, he abuses and exploits Janie's feelings for his own use, which is direct denial of erotic love. Lorde emphatically notes:

To share the power of each other's feelings is different from using another's feelings as we would use a kleenex. When we look the other way from our experience, erotic or otherwise, we use rather than share the feelings of those others who participate in the experience with us. And use without consent of the used is abuse. ("Uses of the Erotic" 58)

Though he shares Janie's passion for sexually satisfying life, Tea Cake turns into a man capable of abusing her feelings for the purpose of securing his masculinity. To be more specific, what triggers Tea Cake to abuse Janie's feelings is his awareness of being socially inferior to his wife, in terms of skin color and economic status.

Tea Cake repeatedly reveals signs of anxieties in his relationship with Janie—a woman lighter-colored and wealthier than himself. From the moment he begins dating Janie to the moment that he aims a gun at her out of rabies-infected madness coupled with jealousy, he is unwittingly captured by the thought that Janie might see him “not good enough” to be her husband due to his lower social status as informed by colorism within the black community. His insecurity is shown for the first time when he squanders Janie’s two hundred dollars and confesses to her the reason he could not take her with him: “Dem wuzn’t no high mucky mucks. Dem wuz railroad hands and dey womenfolks. You [Janie] ain’t usetuh folks lak dat and Ah [Tea Cake] wuz skeered you might git all mad and quit me for takin’ you ’mongst ’em” (*Their Eyes* 124). Here, Tea Cake frankly tells his class-based concerns to Janie, which she simply treats nonsensical at the time.

Even after this honest confession, Tea Cake’s insecurities appear deeply seeded within his consciousness as expressed in his repeated questions to Janie, checking how she thinks about her decision to marry him. At the urgent moment when their house is hit by the hurricane, Tea Cake wants Janie’s positive affirmation about her choice of marrying him, insistently asking: “Ah [Tea Cake] reckon you [Janie] wish now you had of stayed in yo’ big house ’way from such as dis, don’t yuh?” Although Janie answers that she has no regret in marrying him, he throws the question again: “But ’sposing yu wuz tuh die, now. You wouldn’t git mad at me for draggin’

yuh heah?” Upon Janie’s another affirmative no, Tea Cake seems satisfied, though only temporarily: “Well then, Janie, you meant whut you didn’t say, ’cause Ah never *knowed* you wuz so satisfied wid me lak dat. Ah kinda thought—” (*Their Eyes* 159-60; emphasis original). Again, after he is bitten by the mad dog during the hurricane, he asks Janie the almost same question: “reckon you [Janie] never ’spected tuh come tuh dis when you took up wid me [Tea Cake], didja?” (167). Though Hurston does not overtly invite the reader’s attention to Tea Cake’s acts of asking the virtually same questions repeatedly, the repetition itself alludes to his deep-rooted concerns struck by colorism.

There are two telling moments that dramatically depict the explosion of Tea Cake’s insecurities: one when he hits Janie after Mrs. Turner and her brother’s visit and the other when he tries to shoot Janie after being infected by rabies. Mrs. Turner is a woman who prides herself on being lighter-skinned than most blacks in Everglades. Hurston describes Mrs. Turner and her likes as “believers [who] had built an altar to the unattainable—Caucasian characteristics for all.” She is a woman holding “a belief that somehow she and others through worship could attain her paradise—a heaven of straighthaired, thin-lipped, high-nose boned white seraphs,” the physical features which all indicate whiteness (*Their Eyes* 145). As shown in Hurston’s satirical words, Mrs. Turner openly reveals her white supremacist notions as well as contempt for anyone darker-skinned than her.

She affirmatively tells Janie: “Ah can’t stand black niggers. Ah don’t blame de white folks from hatin’ ’em ’cause Ah can’t stand ’em mahself...Us oughta class off” (141).

Then, the chapter that describes Tea Cake’s beating of Janie and the following events discloses the complex and devastating interplays of racism and sexism. Tea Cake has “a brainstorm”—a word foreshadowing his rabies-driven madness—after Mrs. Turner and her brother pay Janie a visit:

Before the week was over he had whipped Janie. Not because her behavior justified his jealousy, but it relieved that awful fear inside him. Being able to whip her reassured him in possession. No brutal beating at all. He just slapped her around a bit to show he was boss. (*Their Eyes* 147)

On this occasion, Donna Aza Weir-Solely argues that “Tea Cake beats Janie because he feels helpless in the face of something larger than himself that he believes to be true: the pervasive and persistent ideology maintaining that his black skin makes him inferior to his wife and, therefore, undeserving of her” (51). Bealer similarly notes, “Tea Cake beats Janie...because he fears that his inadequacy, according to racial hierarchies, threatens their marriage and his masculinity” (322).

Indeed, critics rightly point out the “color-struck” insecurities that Tea Cake lashes out at Janie, which quickly turn into a need to affirm his

patriarchal power before the Everglades community members. “That awful fear inside him” refers to his latent yet unmistakably present anxiety that continues to resurface as seen in his repeated checking of Janie’s mind on marrying him (*Their Eyes* 147). His conversation with his friend Sop-de-Bottom is all the more telling of the factors that make him uneasy about his relationship with Janie. After acceding to Sop-de-Bottom’s comment about leaving marks on Janie’s light skin, Tea Cake boastingly says: “Mah Janie is uh high time woman and uster things. Ah didn’t git her outa de middle uh de road. Ah got her outa uh big fine house. Right now she got money enough in de bank tuh buy up dese ziggaboos and give ’em away” (148). The reason he leaves such remark on Janie’s wealth is less about bragging of her prosperity and being “uh high time woman” than underlining his own male potency to get such woman “outa uh big fine house.” Tea Cake proves his competency out of the insecurities that require, for his own sake, the affirmation of his position as a powerful male. In this sense, he replaces the inferior feelings he holds as a darker-skinned and poorer man than his wife with the feelings of superiority granted by patriarchal beliefs which are further approved by the Everglades community. Not only Sop-de-Bottom who envies Tea Cake for being able to whip a woman as light-colored as Janie but the Everglades men and women turn the incidence of domestic violence into their own sexual fantasies: “The way [Tea Cake] petted and pampered [Janie] as if those two or three face slaps had nearly killed her

made the women see visions and the helpless way she hung on him made men dream dreams” (*Their Eyes* 147).

Another crucial event that dramatically exposes his anxieties takes place when he tries to kill Janie out of the madness-driven jealousy. The rabies infection may make him pull the trigger, but the jealousy stemming from the consciousness of his lower social position makes him pick up a gun and level it at Janie in the first place. Tea Cake does not suddenly decide to kill Janie one day out of plain madness; rather, he is incited to do so only after hearing from Sop-de-Bottom that Mrs. Turner’s brother is in town, who is “real smart” and “got dead straight hair” (*Their Eyes* 142). When Tea Cake takes to bed Sop-de-Bottom and Dockery visit him while Janie goes to doctor to check on the arrangements on Tea Cake’s medicine. This is when Tea Cake hears from Sop-de-Bottom that Mrs. Turner’s brother is in town: “something Sop had told [Tea Cake] made his tongue lie cold and heavy like a dead lizard between his jaws. Mrs. Turner’s brother was back on the muck and now he had this mysterious sickness. People didn’t just take sick like this for nothing” (179-80). Tea Cake’s tongue, which used to be a synecdoche of his ability to make joyful and loving banters with his wife, becomes paralyzed, “cold and heavy like a dead lizard,” by the fear that the light-skinned and educated Mrs. Turner’s brother might have cursed him to take away Janie from him. It is precisely after hearing this news that Tea

Cake hides a gun under his pillow and orders Janie that she stay within his sight: “You [Janie] stay where Ah [Tea Cake] kin see yuh” (181).

Nonetheless, because Janie is a woman resourceful and knowledgeable of her potentials as an erotic subject, she does not submissively sacrifice herself in Tea Cake’s hands; rather, she pulls the trigger faster and protects herself from his attempt to murder her when they point gun at each other in the climactic scene of the novel. The fourth time that Tea Cake’s gun clicks, they fire at each other simultaneously. As Janie is a better shooter than Tea Cake, she kills him while the bullet from Tea Cake’s gun goes right over Janie’s head. Although Janie believes in true consummation of love and devotes herself completely to her relationship with Tea Cake, her unconditional commitment goes through a significant change in the chapter when Tea Cake beats Janie. This is the chapter that Hurston completely excises Janie’s presence from the narrative and fills it with the episode depicting Tea Cake and his muck friends “punishing” Mrs. Turner. It is the turning point in the novel, the critical point that Hurston seems to allude to the inevitable tragedy in the couple’s later life.

Opposite to my reading is Deborah G. Plant’s pessimistic view on Janie’s achievement of autonomy, claiming that “if Janie had not been forced to shoot [Tea Cake] for whom she ‘felt a self-crushing love,’ she would have continued living out her ideal—one that denied her complete autonomy” (168). Plant states thus out of the belief that

Janie submits herself to Tea Cake's patriarchal actions, thereby surrendering "her complete autonomy" to her husband. However, it hardly seems that Janie is unaware of the devastating impact of spousal abuse, especially when Joe Starks's slaps make her desert any hopes in the second marriage. I argue that during the time she is absent from the novel's narrative Janie becomes aware of the possibility that Tea Cake may share similar oppressive features with her previous husbands. In this vein, her absence silently signifies the transformation of her notion about Tea Cake as her ideal lover, the transformation which enables her to pull the trigger faster than him when the most dramatic and tragic moment comes.

After Tea Cake's funeral, Janie returns to Eatonville as an experienced erotic woman. Lorde argues that the black woman who has tasted the "internal sense of satisfaction" can experience the fullness of profound feelings and their power ("Uses of the Erotic" 54). This is to say that once "the power of the erotic" is recognized, there can be no undoing nor going back to the previous stage of lack of self-consciousness and respect. Lorde's words ring particularly true when applied to assessing Janie as an erotic subject. The image of Janie having been to the horizon, as she self-confidently declares to Pheoby at her return to Eatonville, overlaps with Lorde's words. Janie tells Pheoby, "Ah done been tuh de horizon and back and now Ah kin set heah in mah house and live by comparisons" (*Their Eyes* 191). Not only has Janie been to the "horizon" but she is now able to

artfully and consciously utilize the horizon with which she cloaks herself at the very end of the novel: “[Janie] pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much of life in its meshes!” (193). Compared to the men in the epigraph of the novel, who forever keep their eyes on the horizon in hopes that one day the ships with their wishes on board would be within their reach—“For others [the ships] sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by Time” (1)—Janie is metaphorically depicted as skillfully utilizing her horizon. Her masterfulness, experienced enough to handle the horizon at her will, explains her identity as an erotic subject whose profound self-knowledge and understanding of the world empower her to survive the journey and to preserve the memories of her fulfilling erotic experiences with Tea Cake.

Leaving behind all the turbulent events in Everglades from the hurricane to Tea Cake’s death, Janie succeeds to overcome all the obstacles barring her from actualizing her childhood aspirations and to become an experienced and knowledgeable black woman. Crucial to her survival and the preservation of her love with Tea Cake is her capability to select her memories. It is Janie’s strength to live according to her “dream,” as stated in the epigraph of the novel that “the dream is the truth,” and to “act and do things accordingly” (*Their Eyes* 1). Kimberly Nichele Brown insightfully

writes in her book *Writing the Black Revolutionary Diva: Women's Subjectivity and the Decolonizing Text*: "At first glance, Hurston seems to negatively categorize female cognitive processes as selective, but she is actually suggesting that the ways women process memories can be interpreted *as an act of survival*; women discard memories that might prove damaging while they salvage memories that could be considered more life-affirming. Therefore, women shape their dreams, which they interpret as reality, to fit their own needs and agendas" (186; emphasis added). Sharing the same sentiment with Brown, I read Janie as an erotic subject who constructs reality according to her dream of maintaining erotically satisfying relationship. Beginning her novel with women's capability of selecting memories, Hurston underscores the fact that Janie's love with Tea Cake is secured within her ability to excise the unpleasant and save the most pleasing and loving memories. The novel ends with Janie visually imagining Tea Cake's eternal presence with her, seeing "[t]he kiss of his memory ma[k]e pictures of love and light against the wall" (*Their Eyes* 193). Lighted by Tea Cake and his loving memories, Janie feels evermore peaceful in the house which used to be the symbol of loneliness and oppression; Janie's erotic memories of Tea Cake change the symbol of oppression into the symbol of love, thereby completing the establishment of her identity as an erotic being.

IV. Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to trace the development of Janie's subjectivity by examining her gaze and identity as an erotic being. Analyzing the articulation of Janie's voice and its subsequent impact on Joe's patriarchal oppression has been one of major ways to evaluate her successfulness in self-realization. In addition to Janie's voice, this thesis suggests that the development of her sight into "oppositional gaze" can also be deemed as a tool with which the achievements of Janie's journey can be gauged, especially when she is empowered by the resistant and self-affirming agency of her gaze to publicly stand and speak against Joe. Furthermore, this thesis extends the meaning of Janie's satiation of sexual desires to argue for her establishment as an erotic subject—the achievement made possible by the combination of her sexually satisfying experience and cultural connection with the black American workers in Everglades. In this vein, Janie's life with Tea Cake can be viewed with greater importance as not only her sexual satisfaction but participation in cultural activities make up her identity as a black woman with the erotic power.

Thus, one of Hurston's achievements in *Their Eyes* lies in drawing a character whose unprecedentedness stems from the self-confidence to resist conforming to social norms and to give self-affirmation to her experiences. Regardless of the hardships faced in the racist and sexist

ambience of the era, Janie relentlessly searches for personal contentment both in connection with herself and the people of her race; the former of the two made possible by her resourcefulness leading to the cultivation of her gaze, and the latter by her pursuit of the erotic power.

From the moment that Janie gains the first understanding of herself through a visual means, her act of looking plays a crucial role in ripening her understanding of the world and ultimately develops into her gaze. Janie's gaze resembles what hooks elaborates as "the oppositional gaze" of black female spectators in cinematic realm. Though the objects of their gaze and form of expression are different, what is commonly present in Janie's and the black female spectators' gaze is the resistant agency which enables them to deny the negative images of their bodies imposed from the outside with a keen sense of self-awareness. Janie's "oppositional gaze" drives her to verbally attack Joe, resulting in his disempowerment and following death. Significantly, her gaze arms her with the strength to endure Joe's oppression and social seclusion, and thereby makes possible the establishment of her identity as an erotic being in her marriage with Tea Cake.

In Everglades, Janie succeeds to satisfy her sexual appetite and to share cultural knowledge and experience with other blacks in the community, the achievements forming her identity as an erotic being. To Janie who used to be shunned away from any opportunity to either maintain a strong sexual

bond with her husband or partake in the cultural events in Eatonville, the new scope of experiences in Everglades invites her to the world full of emotions that compose the core of “the power of the erotic.” Whereas Janie solitarily practices self-growth during her previous marriage years, she gains a more socially established sense of self through her sexual and cultural interaction with Tea Cake and the muck people. Figuring Janie as a pioneer of the black community at the end of the novel, Hurston herself becomes a pioneering black female writer whose determination to explore the spiritual growth of a black woman in the early twentieth century, inspires many black writers in the later generation.

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국문초록

『그들의 눈은 신을 보고 있었다』에 나타난 흑인 여성의 응시와 ‘에로틱의 힘’

본 논문은 조라 닐 허스턴의 소설 『그들의 눈은 신을 보고 있었다』의 주인공 제이니 크로포드 킬릭스 스타크 우즈가 자신만의 응시와 ‘에로틱의 힘’을 가진 흑인 여성으로서의 자아를 형성하는 과정을 탐구한다. 제이니의 세 번의 결혼 경험은 그녀 자신과 세상에 대한 이해를 심화한다. 애정 없는 첫 번째 결혼으로부터 조와 함께 도망친 후에, 제이니는 자신의 가부장적 위치와 중산층 계급의 힘을 이용하는 조에 의해 사회적 은둔을 강요당한다. 하지만 제이니는 그 고립의 시간을 자아성장의 시간으로 활용하며, 외부 억압으로부터 내면의 자아를 보호하고, 비판적으로 바라보는 능력을 기른다. 벨 혹스가 주장하는 흑인 여성 관람객들의 ‘대항적 응시’ 개념을 이용하여, 본 논문은 제이니가 자신만의 ‘대항적 응시’의 힘을 기르며, 그것이 이후 강력한 발화와 결합해 조의 가부장적 억압을 해체함을 밝힌다. 또한 제이니가 노동 계급 흑인들의 주인공 층을 이루는 미국 남부 진흙땅(the muck) 문화를 대표하는 티 케익과의 결혼을 통해 성적 욕망을 해소하고 그곳 흑인들과 문화적 유대감을 즐기는 과정을 살펴본다. 오드리 로드가 역설하는 흑인 여성들의 에로틱의 힘의 개념을 바탕으로, 본 논문은 제이니가 에버글레이즈 진흙땅에서 얻는 새로운 지식과 경험이 그녀를 에로틱 주체로 만든다고 주장한다. 티 케익을 죽인 후에 이튼빌로 돌아감에도 불구하고, 에로틱 주체로서 자신의 힘과 성취를 스스로 입증할 수 있는 제이니는 티 케익과의 삶의 의미를 긍정한다.

주요어: 조라 닐 허스턴, 『그들의 눈은 신을 보고 있었다,』 ‘대항적 응시,’
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