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ZORA NEALE HURSTON' S WOMEN

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FIRAT UNIVERSITY

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**ZORA NEALE HURSTON' S WOMEN**

Master Thesis

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To My Parents  
with all my love

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## ABSTRACT

Master Thesis

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In the study called ' Zora Neale Hurston's Women', it is tried to make clear where the Afro-American woman reached economically and socially at the beginning of 20th century. It is examined how this reflected in her works by her own perspective. In the selected novels and short stories, women's perception of life, their sufferings, how they endure the oppression for some time, the process of their finding themselves and the mistakes they make and the things they grasp in this period are investigated with a critical viewpoint.

In her works, Hurston, whose childhood passed in a town where African-American people were the majority, mentions more about male-female issue rather than the subject of racial discrimination. In **Their Eyes Were Watching God** (1937) we witness the adventure of a black woman called Janie Crawford who is looking for her own identity in a man-dominated black society. In "**Sweat**"

(1926), Delia Jones washes the whites' clothes and works hard in order to maintain her home economically, besides, there remains no tyranny which she does not suffer from her husband. Being different from the two works mentioned above, in **Jonah's Gourd Vine** (1934) Hurston introduces a wise woman character to her readers. Lucy, the heroine of the novel, does not have to undergo a process through which Jane has done. She is already pleased with the point she has reached and with herself. She also sacrifices herself for the sake of her man she loves and she accepts all the negative happenings in her marriage as well. Missie May in **"The Gilded Six Bits"** (1933), for the sake of her love to her husband, becomes together with a man whom she thinks as rich so that she can help her husband to overcome his weakness towards money. The awareness she experiences by realizing that the man is not rich cannot be thought as simple. Contrary to these characters, in **Seraph On The Suwanee** (1948), Hurston presents her readers a white woman called Arvay Henson who convinces herself to the fact that she will never find out love and happiness in life. Arvay, who could not get rid of her complex of being a spinster even after she has married and who has a communication problem with her husband, in her journey to a self-actualized life, comes to a point that the readers can take a deep breath. The works handled in this study are classified according to their common points. In the first chapter, we witness the black woman's newly-gained position through Nanny, Janie's grandmother, who defines black woman as 'the mule of the world'. In the second chapter, verbal and physical violence that the black men and the society implement on the women are told. In the third chapter, the awakening of the women, their adopting assertive attitudes towards their men and society are scrutinized. In addition,

while becoming whole as a woman and as a person their belief in God and tendency to education make them strong.



## ÖZET

YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ

**ZORA NEALE HURSTON' IN KADINLARI**

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“Zora Neale Hurston’ının Kadınları” adlı çalışmada, 20. yüzyılın başlarında özellikle Afrikalı-Amerikalı kadının geldiği noktanın Hurston’ının bakış açısıyla yapıtlarına nasıl yansıdığına açıklık getirilmeye çalışılmıştır. Seçilen romanlarda ve öykülerde kadınların yaşamı nasıl algıladıklarına, çektikleri eziyetlere ve baskılara belli bir süre nasıl boyun eğdiklerine, kendilerini bulma süreçlerine ve bu dönemde yaptıkları hatalara ve tutundukları şeylere eleştirel bir bakış açısıyla yaklaşmıştır.

Küçüklüğü, Afrikalı-Amerikalı kesimin çoğunluğunu oluşturduğu bir kasabada geçmiş olan Hurston, yapıtlarında ırk ayrımından çok kadın-erkek sorununa değinmiştir. **Their Eyes Were Watching God (Tanrı’ya Bakıyorlardı)** (1937) ’da

siyah ataerkil toplumda siyah bir kadın olan Janie Crawford'ın kendi kimliğini arayıp bulma macerasına tanık oluruz. "**Sweat**" (1926)de Delia Jones evini geçindirmek için beyazların çamaşırlarını yıkar, emek verir ve bunun yanında da kocası Sykes'dan görmediği eziyet kalmaz. **Jonah's Gourd Vine (Bir Rahip Bir Erkek)** (1934)' de Hurston sözü edilen iki eserinden farklı olarak okuyucunun karşısına bilge bir kadın karakter çıkarır. Romanın kadın karakteri Lucy'nin Janie gibi evrim geçirmesine gerek yoktur. O zaten geldiği noktadan ve kendinden son derece hoşnuttur. Fakat Lucy'de sevdiği erkek uğruna kendini feda eder ve olup bitenlere boyun eğer. "**The Gilded Six-Bits**" (1933)'deki Missie May ise kocasına olan aşkı ve onun para karşısındaki ezikliğini yenmesi uğruna zengin diye zannettiği bir adamla birlikte olur. Adamın zenginliğinin yalan olduğunu anlamasıyla yaşadığı farkındalık hiç de hafife alınacak gibi değildir. Bu kahramanların tersine **Seraph On The Suwanee** (1948)'de Hurston hiçbir zaman aşkı ve mutluluğu bulamayacağına kendini inandırmış Arvay Henson adlı beyaz bir kadın karakter sunar okuyucusuna. Evde kalmış kız olma kompleksini evlendikten sonra da üzerinden atamayan ve eşiyle iletişim sorunu yaşayan Arvay'in kendini bulma ve anlama yolculuğunda ulaştığı nokta okuyucuya derin bir nefes aldırır. Söz konusu yapıtlar ele alınırken ortak yönlerine göre sınıflandırılmıştır. Birinci bölümde zenci kadını "dünyanın katırı" olarak adlandıran Janie'nin büyükannesi Nanny'den yola çıkarak zenci kadının geldiği noktaya, ikinci bölümde zenci erkeğin ve toplumun kadına uyguladığı sözlü ve fiziksel şiddete, üçüncü bölümde ise kadınların uyanışlarına ve artık karşı koymaya başlamalarına ve bunu yaparken de Tanrı'ya olan inanışlarının ve eğitime olan düşkünlüklerinin onları nasıl güçlü kıldığına yer verilmiştir.

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## 1.0. INTRODUCTION

Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960) is a leading figure in African-American literature of the 20th century. There is a conflict about her birth place and date but in general the date mentioned above is accepted. She was born in Notasulga, Alabama in 1891 and raised in Eatonville, Florida. She was a Black-American female writer, anthropologist, and folklorist who received her training at Morgan Academy in Baltimore, Howard University in Washington, and Barnard College and Columbia University in New York. She published seven books; four novels, two books of folklore, and an autobiography-and a lot of short stories, plays and dozens of essays, but she first gained attention with her short stories such as "John Redding Goes to Sea"(1921) and "Spunk"(1925).

Hurston arrived in New York in 1925 and became the member of the **Harlem Renaissance**, also known as the New Negro Movement, an African-American cultural movement of the late 1920s and early 1930s which was centered in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City. One cannot define the Harlem Renaissance with a common style or ideology but writers who took part in this movement forwarded two goals. One group tried to point out the injustices of racism in American life and other artists began to promote the unique culture among African-Americans. Being a member of the Harlem Renaissance, Zora Neale Hurston found a place to appreciate her own race too. In this artistic movement, she wanted to explore her own culture and affirm pride in her race.

During 1930s and 1940s, the leading figure in African-American literature was Richard Wright (1908-1960). Unlike Hurston, Wright wrote about political terms and African-American people's struggle in life. Although many readers were not interested in cultural writings Hurston spent so much of the time celebrating her own culture that existed outside the larger impressions. Richard Wright did not appreciate her brand of politics because she did celebrate the African-American community instead of just solely looking at the oppression. Other popular African-American authors of the time such as Ralph Ellison (1914-1994) and Langston Hughes(1902-1967) were also engaged in leftist political issues and the struggle of African-Americans. Hurston did not give answer to the expectations of the literary environment. She never dealt with the issue of racism of whites toward blacks in her works.

"She simply could not depict blacks as defeated, humiliated, degraded, or victimized, because she did not experience black people or herself that way ... Hurston was determined to write about black life as it existed apart from racism, injustice, Jim Crow-where black people laughed, celebrated, loved, sorrowed, struggled-unconcerned about white people and completely unaware of being 'a problem.'"<sup>1</sup>

She was raised in Eatonville where the community was largely populated by the blacks and where she did not witness the segregation. For this reason, depiction the oppression of the whites upon the blacks was never her main theme. She herself did not experience any humiliation as a

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<sup>1</sup> Alice Walker, **I Love Myself When I Am Laughing... And Then Again When I Am Looking Mean and Impressive**, New York, 1979, p.17.

black person, so she presented their daily and ordinary lives.

In her letter to Hamilton Holt, written on February 11, 1943, Hurston concludes that "it is too hard to reveal one's inner self."<sup>2</sup> However, she had a character who achieved to share her feelings, her successes, her sorrow, her inside and outside with others and she was good at doing these whether orally or written. As an anthropologist, she devoted herself to introduce her own culture to others and she was capable of reflecting the oral tradition of African-American culture in prose. She was the first Black-American who collected African-American folklore by doing fieldwork. We know that her anthropological researches which were financed especially by white patrons became the basis of almost all her works and Hurston could celebrate her own culture well when she published **Mules and Men (1935)**, a collection of 'big old lies' told 'on the store porch' by the working class African-American people of her hometown.<sup>3</sup> She achieved to capture the folk speech, folk culture and even every folk material, Southern Negro's life, their humor, passions, life styles and values. She used standard English and Southern black dialect together in her works. She recorded the wonderful oral culture of stories and songs. During her life time, she did not break off her Eatonville memories and she looked at the life through its window as a daughter of her soil, so almost all her works carry something from her real life. As Arnold Rampersand remarked in the foreword of **Mules and Men** "In one sense, it is possible to say that Hurston had become more of an African-American cultural nationalist, seeing more of the world and herself in terms of race and her own

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<sup>2</sup> Carla Kaplan, **Zora Neale Hurston: A life in Letters**, New York, 2002, p.478.

<sup>3</sup> Zora Neale Hurston, **Mules and Men**, New York, 1990, p.8.

blackness."<sup>4</sup> As a successful student she was trained at Morgan Academy and Howard University as said before. In these places she experienced the world outside Florida. Therefore, she could criticize and understand her own black surroundings.

Hurston was married several times and she had a lot of liaisons, but we know that she had difficulties in her relationships. She was unable to sustain a meaningful relationship, so one can say that she has very much in common with her women as well as her men characters. Accordingly, Zora Neale Hurston, as a woman and as a colored person, in her portrayal of black life with almost its every detail, did not neglect mentioning the realistic portrayal of black women's life. In this regard, the works of her, in particular, her novels **Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937)**, **Jonah's Gourd Vine (1934)**, **Seraph On The Suwanee (1948)** and her short stories "**Sweat**" (1926) and "**The Gilded Six-Bits**" (1933) explore women's reality well.

It is true that at the beginning of the twentieth century white man holds all the power and privilege in America and African-American man cannot intimidate this. He wants to prove his manhood and his power in a way, so his wife is the most suitable for she is the closest. In all walks of American society, women and blacks are considered the inferiors and black American women are at the very end of the chain. Hurston wants her readers to know that there are a lot of obstacles in African-American people's lives, but among them, black woman's position in life is more difficult. They must endure the racial and the sexual oppression at the same time.

Hurston pictures married women and their problems of being oneself in their marriages and their overcoming the

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<sup>4</sup> Arnold Rampersad, "**Foreword.**" **Mules and Men**, New York, 1990, p.xxi.

oppression of their husbands and the stereotypical roles of the community that they are supposed to act accordingly. She tells the stories of domestic violence (all her women are exposed to violence in a way) and women's courage and strength to get out of abusive relationships. She tells the stories of women close to God and how their faith in God help them in their rigorous lives. Hurston shows us the patient women and women who are in search of themselves and want spiritual wholeness or self-actualization. On the other hand, she pictures men who are physically abusive toward their wives and who are sometimes adulterous.

Hurston, a human being above all, experienced three failed marriages and did not have a meaningful relationship with her father. So these cause her to build a negative male figure in her mind and she reflects this in her works. By presenting us, the readers, the characters like Janie, Delia or Missie May, Hurston wants women to be individuals first and find some segment and potential of themselves. She wants them to break the rules and rebel against the society's rules for women and not to adopt the labels that society has placed on them. Hurston, regarded in the feminist canon, especially in Janie in **Their Eyes Were Watching God** and in Lucy in **Jonah's Gourd Vine** achieve her desire well. The two carry feminist characteristics. Janie's telling her story to Pheoby and Lucy's giving advice to her daughter, Isie about life and education in her death-bed show us their voice, their rebellion against the rules of male-dominant society. They wish their life to become influential after them and want other women to follow them as role models.

Men's treatment to their women in their marriages are not approvable. Men want obedient and silent women and always belittle their wives and minimize their function in



their minds, but Hurston's women are respectable. Although men see them invisible and ignore their needs and existence, they can achieve "self-hood". Hurston's women are productive and intelligent. They know their men well and by enduring domestic violence they can find themselves as well. They endure men's intercourses outside the marriages and the oppression of the community at the same time. By intensifying especially women's sex role, Hurston wants to give the message that the slavery time is over and women must gain their voice and become useful first for themselves and then for others (like a feminist) from then on. Hurston's women produce stories, work hard and make their houses beautiful. They understand the life and act accordingly. They are close to God, share their inside with God and find their way. They know how and when to speak out against their men.

## 2.0 "DE NIGGER WOMAN IS DE MULE UH DE WORLD"

In Hurston's **Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937)**, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. defines it as "a bold feminist novel, the first to be explicitly so in the Afro-American tradition."<sup>5</sup> We actually read the life story of the protagonist, Janie who tells her story to her close friend, Pheoby, after she has experienced three marriages and found "herself" as a woman. At the beginning of the novel, we understand that Janie is raised by her grandmother and does not meet her mother and father. She is now an ignorant sixteen-year-old girl living in 1930s' America who does not know surely who she is and how she wants to live. She does not have a real vision and aim in life. Nanny, her grandmother, starts to fear about Janie's future for she is a good-looking girl and local boys want to go out with her. Nanny has seen Janie kissing a boy under a pear tree which symbolizes sexual and emotional fulfillment of Janie and which represents her sexual awakening. Hurston also parallels the springtime bolossom of the tree with Janie's teenage. Nanny urges Janie to marry because she wants to see Janie in a secure position before she dies. Nanny is a narrow-minded person who has a deep obsession related with race case. She has such a big obsession that she could not notice she is a woman. One day while Nanny is giving advice to Janie, she puts forth her understanding of what life should be for a black woman for consideration:

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<sup>5</sup> Henry Louis Gates Jr. , "Afterword." *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston, New York, 1990, p.197.

"Honey, de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out. Maybe it's some place way off in de ocean where de black man is in power, but we don't know nothin' but what we see. So de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his womenfolks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see. Ah been prayin' fuh it tuh be different wid you. Lawd, Lawd, Lawd!"(14)

As understood from the quotation, Nanny has accepted the rules of white dominant society. She advises Janie that if she wants to be happy, she also should accept the norms. She wants to inform Janie, who has discovered her sexual identity recently, that the white man is the ruler in this world and she must obey him. She says that black women are the mules of the world and she shapes Janie according to the repressed personality of slaves, but in fact she does not want Janie to be a mule. Nanny also draws attention to the fact that how much we are sorry, these facts must not be forgotten.

Janie's mother is urged to be a prostitute by white master who perceives black women as good to use as prostitutes. Because of this, Nanny wants to save Janie from this negative image by urging her to marry:

"You know, honey, us colored folks is branches without roots and that makes things come round in queer ways. You in particular. Ah was born back due in slavery so it wasn't for me to fulfill my

dreams of whut a woman oughta be and to do. Dat's one of de hold-backs of slavery. But nothing can't stop you from wishin'. You can't beat nobody down so low till you can rob 'em of they will. Ah didn't want to be used for a work-ox and a brood-sow and Ah didn't want mah daughter used dat way neither. It sho wasn't mah will for things to happen lak they did."(16)

As a race, black people do not have a respectable history in America. They have been slaves for hundereds of years and Nanny now recounts to Janie the difficulties that she has experienced as a woman and as a slave. However, time is changed and there is a generation gap beetwen Janie and Nanny. Nanny's life has been one of poverty and hardship, with any hope of womanly advancement. She did not become the woman that she wanted in slavery time. And now she has a lot of positive wishes for Janie's life according to her own standards. Nevertheless, she makes mistake. Nanny herself was seen neither as a human being nor as a woman. So she wants Janie to become a woman. Nanny thinks a woman can only become successful in life by marrying a rich man, but her understanding of being a woman, which means to marry with a rich man and to be under the protection of him, does not work and it is not meaningful either. Nanny unwillingly neglects Janie's feelings. At this point, Patricia R. Schroeder says: "Nanny, the grandmother who raised Janie, did her best to protect Janie, but the fears born of Nanny's life in slavery do not serve Janie well."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Patricia R. Schroeder, "Rootwork: Arthur Flowers, Zora Neale Hurston, and the "literary hoodoo" tradition." *African American Review*, Summer, 2002.

Although she seems to be protecting Janie, she gives the biggest damage to her under the name of protection. She does not see that the slavery time is ended for the blacks and Schroeder goes on like that: "Through a lifetime of slavery, economic hardship, and loss, Nanny's spirit has been beaten down. She is primordial, part root and part leaf, but she is impotent, with no true wisdom to offer Janie in seeking spiritual wholeness."<sup>7</sup>Nanny lacks vision because of her negative experiences as a woman and as a slave, so she cannot give Janie any proper direction. She refuses that Janie is an individual, a woman who has a life of her own. So Hurston sums up the limits of this protection's damages after Janie's two unfulfilling marriages like that:

" Here Nanny had taken the biggest thing God ever made, the horizon-for no matter how far a person can go the horizon is stil way beyond you-and pinched it in to such a little bit of a thing that she could tie it about her granddaughter's neck tight enough to choke her. She hated the old woman who had twisted her so in the name of love " (89).

Her grandmother wrappes the horizon so tight around her throat that Janie cannot behave as she likes and she cannot become "herself". Nanny's horizon is too narrow but Janie's dreams are great. "The metaphor she uses (black woman as mule of the world) is one of the dumbness. Janie, living in different social and historical circumstances from those in which her grandmother was raised, learns to

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

“speak openly rather than pray silently.”<sup>8</sup>Being different from her grandmother, Janie has learned to speak rather than obeying blindly. Jacqueline de Weever puts a meaningful comment about Janie and her grandmother into consideration in her book **Mythmaking And Metaphor In Black Women’s Fiction (1991)**. She says;

“Janie survives by running away from expectations. Her strong grandmother was raped and produced a daughter, who was also raped and produced Janie. Janie’s mother had many lovers and ran away with one of them, leaving Janie with Nanny. Fearing that Janie will turn out like her mother, Nanny marries her off when she is fifteen and then dies. Her death actually frees Janie to live her own authentic life, to please herself by marrying Tea Cake after her second husband dies.”<sup>9</sup>

Through Nanny’s words, we learned that the Negro slave women are sexually abused and this is ordinary. Nanny does not want her granddaughter to be such an object and being a traditional woman, she sees marriage as the safest way out of this. Janie cannot find inspiration or a light of happiness in her marriage with Logan. With Nanny’s death, she feels herself free because there is nobody before her to dictate the social order.

Janie comes to a point that she does not see women as mules because she has gained consciousness, so she kills Nanny’s cast of mind in life by knowing herself well. Janie, now and from now on, can speak as an individual

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<sup>8</sup> Peter Messent, **New Readings Of The American Novel: Narrative Theory and its Application**, London, 1990, p.286.

<sup>9</sup> Jacqueline de Weever, **Mythmaking And Metaphor In Black Women’s Fiction**, New York, 1991, p.142.

woman because her throat becomes loose well then which means her rebirth. So she says "Ah done lived Grandma's way, now Ah means tuh live mine." (114) By giving importance to Nanny and Janie's relationship in two generations, Hurston wants to show African American women's position in the 1930s. She suggests this position cannot have any resemblance with the slavery time. John Trombold explains it by saying "Hurston's characterization of Janie as subject redefines the African American woman's social position in an era in which Nanny's stoic code for life no longer serves."<sup>10</sup> Janie, in her earlier marriages with Logan and Jody, in which she is treated like a mule, serves the mule figure of Nanny, but she in a short time throws the mule image of women away from her shoulders by escaping from Logan to Jody and by pouring out her inside to Jody in his death-bed. Maria V. Johnson argues that "Hurston replaces the mule relationship - an unequal, oppressive power relationship that keeps women in the 'one-down' position with a relationship in which Janie and Tea Cake work side by side as equals in the Everglades."<sup>11</sup> Their arrival in the Everglades is a moment of fulfillment for Janie as she finds herself surrounded by fertile nature. When Janie decides to join Tea Cake in the fields they become together all day. They plant beans in the rich fertile fields of the Everglades and they go hunting

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<sup>10</sup>John Trombold, "The Minstrel Show Goes to the Great War: Zora Neale Hurston's Mass Cultural Other." **MELUS**, Spring, 1999.  
[http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m2278/is\\_1\\_24/ai\\_58411665](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2278/is_1_24/ai_58411665).

<sup>11</sup> Maria V. Johnson, "The world in a jug and the stopper in hand": 'Their Eyes' as blues performance - her - novel entitled 'Their Eyes Were Watching God' by Zora Neale Hurston, **African American Review**, Fall, 1998.  
[http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m2838/is\\_n3\\_v32/ai\\_21232161](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2838/is_n3_v32/ai_21232161).

together. She starts to do the things which are only performed by men.

Lastly, although we see identification of women with mule in Hurston's works like *Nanny*, for almost all her other women characters, this image does not come true. Women are now awakened and they can adopt an assertive attitude toward life in general.



### 3.0. VERBAL AND PHYSICAL VIOLENCE ON WOMEN / OPPRESSIVE MEN OPPRESSIVE ENVIRONMENT

Hurston's men generally disregard the emotional life of their wives. They only see them as objects without soul. Accordingly women are not supposed to have individual identity. Hurston perceives the Afro-American male as limited in developing a sense of self-worth so that they cannot esteem women. Men always want women to accept them unconditionally and to become voiceless through their lives. According to men, a woman must accept patriarchal power and male superiority and she always must be under the shadow of man's dominance. This dominance can easily give way to violence. So women often face violence in their marriages. Hurston's prime female characters like Janie in **Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937)**, Delia in **"Sweat" (1926)**, Lucy in **Jonah's Gourd Vine (1934)** are sometimes forced to defend themselves against their husbands. In her works we witness verbal violence like insulting and physical violence like frequent slapping. For example, in **Their Eyes Were Watching God**, Janie's first husband, Logan Killicks, who is a wealthy middle-aged farmer, is a repressive man. He is older than Janie and often beats her and does not satisfy her soul. One can say that the relation between Logan and Janie is a master-slave one. He intends to use her in a way each time. He wants Janie to work as a laborer but meets Janie's resistance. To illustrate, the time Logan calls her to come help him to move something in the garden, the dialog between them is very important:

Janie: "You don't need mah help out dere, Logan.  
Youse in yo' place and Ah'm in mine."

Logan: "You ain't got no particular place. It's wherever Ah need yuh. Git uh move on yuh, and dat quick."

...

Logan: "Ah'll take hol tuh dat ax and come in dere and kill yuh!" (31)

Janie is now responding from kitchen and one can say that she is courageous enough to refuse his call. Although the woman here admits the traditional roles of women, the man cannot be satisfied with it. He threatens her and wants her obedience. In any case, he all the time insults Janie by calling her 'spoiled' in order to compensate his old age near her. In the course of their marriage, although Janie wants to feel love for Logan, she cannot. She, in a short time, understands that this marriage does not bring anything. Hurston describes Janie's feelings and frustration after her recognition him well: "She knew now that marriage did not make love. Janie's first dream was dead, so she became a woman." (25) Her expectation from marriage is "love" but it does not become true. As Hurston says "The dream is the truth" does not become true in Janie's first marriage. Actually, the journey of "being a woman" or "being oneself" are the same for Janie. She experiences a disappointing marriage that does not satisfy her soul and her heart, but as Hurston says "...she became a woman" not in the full sense but a bit. Janie is a determined character that she will try to reach her dreams again. The moment Janie understands her position in her marriage with Logan, she escapes to Joe, since this relationship does not satisfy her soul and does not fit with her inner world. In this context, one can say that Janie is strong, adventurous, fearless and can take risk

easily. In any case, she has already known Logan and thinks that this marriage means nothing. Janie does not console herself by saying that this marriage will be alright today or tomorrow and she tries her luck.

Even Hurston does not study her marriage with Logan in detail or long in the novel. One day when Logan goes to buy a mule, Janie meets Joe Starks while he is passing in front of their home. This good-looking stranger immediately attracts her attention. They start to meet secretly and after about two weeks of flirtation, they run away. Her marriage with Joe Starks, who is ambitious and has the art of speaking, can be seen as a step for her road to maturity. She has just released from a disappointing marriage with Logan Killicks. So everything goes well until she has discovered his real face and there is no difference between Logan and Joe. One day when the townspeople want her to make speech after Joe because they have just come to Eatonville, Joe does not give permission to Janie and he says them "thank yuh fuh yo' compliments, but mah wife don't know nothin' 'bout no speech-makin'. Ah never married her for nothin' lak dat. She's uh woman and her place is in de home."(45) At this time, the oppressing and silencing man figure of Joe irritates Janie, who has heard such words before. Hurston's description of Janie makes it clear that so far now Janie cannot think about what she wants or what she likes in this life and this position forces Janie to think for herself for the first time:

"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.”(43)

Verbal violence of Joe on Janie help her understand that there is something wrong in her marriage and life in general. Symbolizing society's opinion, Joe thinks that women know nothing about making speech, but we see how he contradicts with himself after one page. While Janie thinks that she cannot run the shop on her own, it is Joe Starks who tells her “I god, Ah don't see how come yuh can't. 'Tain't nothin' a tall yuh hinder yuh if yuh got uh thimble full uh sense. You got tuh. Ah got too much else on mah hands as Naylor ”(44) If Janie is a bit intelligent she can do that. That is to say, they think women have intelligence when they are in need of them, but again it is the contradictory characteristics of the society that accepts in the way that a woman's place is her own home. By applying verbal violence the man takes the woman's verbal activity from her hands. Generally the townspeople are gathered on the Joe Starks' porch and tell stories. One day, when stories are being told about the mule, Janie only watches them. She “... loved the conversation and sometimes she thought up good stories on the mule, but Joe had forbidden her to indulge”(53). Joe does not want her to have confidence in herself and also he does not want her to show it to others. That is to say “In American society, moreover, many believe women generally are unable to tell jokes “correctly” in any case.”<sup>12</sup> Joe is one of those who insults women's creative power, but indeed Janie is creative, too. Lots of stories appear in her mind but she

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<sup>12</sup> John Lowe, **Jump at the Sun**, Urbana, 1994, p.52.

cannot express them because of her repressed inner existence.

Added to this, there is another reason why Joe prohibits Janie is that he is so jealous. He does not want any other men to see and like her, and because of his intense jealousy he also urges Janie to put a scarf on her head in the shop. Towards the end of their marriage, Janie starts to discover her inner voice that gives her strength and the true knowledge of herself. She is now a woman who knows herself, her beauty, her age and a lot of other things well. His verbal attacks become more vicious and frequent that one day when Joe comments on her appearance negatively, Janie cannot stand and gives this answer:

“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 round 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.” (79)

Janie is now sure of herself and her womanness. She can assert her being boldly and clearly. She also can see Joe’s defects and is not afraid of expressing them to him. After her words Joe is so disappointed that Hurston describes his feelings like that: “Then Joe Starks realized all the meanings and his vanity bled like a flood. Janie had robbed him of his illusion of irresistible maleness that all men cherish, which was terrible”(79). Now Joe starts to discover that she is ‘feeling cold’ towards him,

and Hurston asserts that a woman must shoot a man with his weapon. While he tries to insult her she gives him a lesson about the reality. At this point Janie is successful. Throughout the novel, she comes to the position to know how to shoot someone whether by words or real weapons. Now that he is getting older and his self-confidence near Janie is getting weak, Joe starts to insult Janie before the community people. He wants to show and prove his power. What's more, he often beats Janie because of his jealousy, since to be able to beat a woman is the sign that he is the owner of her. Even Tea Cake, Janie's last husband, beats her because of his jealousy, but at this time, Janie accepts beating. According to Janie, if a woman loves her partner very much, it does not matter how much he beats her. So Janie measures Tea Cake's love, jealousy with his beating and she does not oppose to it. Here we see her traditional soul has not died completely. Having a bigoted point of view, Joe thinks that a woman must totally give in and must not speak a lot. She must only do what have been told. So in the course of this marriage, Janie learns "She had an inside and outside..."(72) and she can listen to her feelings and thoughts and in addition she can criticize them. She learns how to sustain her dreams and emotions lively inside her in this vehement surrounding. Verbal violence often gives way to physical violence. So if Janie does not listen to him, she knows that she can face physical violence. Thereupon, by this marriage, she gives the signals of not being able to find what she has hoped. In reality, despite the fact that she is not able to utter or tell what she wants, it is not that! It is anything but not that! Janie is someone who can say "that is what I look for" if she finds the real love. At this point Janie's case is similar to not being able to tell the seller what kind

of an object we want exactly while looking for different shoes, bags or anything else. Because even we, ourselves, do not know how / what it is until we see it with our eyes. And if we can say "that is it!" when we see it, we find what we have been looking for so long and as a result we feel relieved. One can say that what Janie experiences is something like that in her first two marriages.

The oppressing man figure of Joe does not fade away even after his death. His oppression was so deep that Janie cannot find peace even where he is not. "Janie talked and laughed in the store at times, but never seemed to want to go further. She was happy except for the store. She knew by her head that she was absolute owner, but it always seemed to her that she was still clerking for Joe and that soon he would come in and find something wrong that she had done." (91-92) On the other hand, this is the first time that Janie has become alone in her life after Joe's death. She enjoys this feeling: "Besides she liked being lone some for a change. This freedom feeling was fine." (90) However, her oppressive environment that is to say Eatonville people or its men do not give her peace and do not permit her to live this feeling of freedom. Due to the fact that they think that "uh woman by herself is uh pitiful thing" and "dey needs aid and assistance" they say Janie " you needs uh man" (90). Janie laughs at them because she believes she is not the only woman living alone in this world.

Correspondingly, Hurston's protagonist Delia in her short story "**Sweat**" also faces verbal and physical violence in her marriage, but the sequence of events are different that of Janie's life. Hurston portrays a systematic, tidy and successful woman, Delia, who earns money in order to get by. She is hard-pressed for money because there is nobody to bring money home. Her husband, Sykes, an

oppressive man, is an evil character. He does not work and he actually cannot stand her wife's doing white people's laundry. Delia in a way accepts the superiority of the whites and oppression but what Sykes does not put up with is that. Sykes develops a grudge against the whites, so doing white people's laundry and becoming a part of their life puts Delia at the same position with them in Sykes' eyes. She performs a work that her husband does not like and this causes all the trouble in the house, but Delia has no other choice. In order to eat a piece of bread she must do something. They have been married for fifteen years and Delia's being useful for getting by and Sykes' being useless for years comes to the point of high discordance and exploding. The story is from the last days of their marriage and it means a lot that it is the summary of this marriage.

We first meet with Delia when she washes the laundry with a song on her tongue which one can think an escaping way of her from the difficulties of life and her hardships in her marriage. While doing her work she, as a woman, wonders where her husband is. Then Hurston introduces Sykes to us firstly with a bull whip in his hand standing over Delia with laughter. The bull whip as Chuck Jackson says "...carries with it the historical weight of slavery (corporeal, economic, and regional.)"<sup>13</sup> Delia screams at him: "Sykes, what you throw dat whip on me like dat? You know it would skeer me-looks just like a snake, on 'you knows how skeered Ah is of snakes. "(197) But Sykes is intelligent. He saves all the words that Delia used and he

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<sup>13</sup> Chuck Jackson, "Waste and Whiteness: Zora Neale Hurston and the Politics of Eugenics," **African American Review**, Winter, 2000.

[http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m2838/is\\_4\\_34/ai\\_70434327](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2838/is_4_34/ai_70434327).



knows well what troubles Delia or not. He will use this advantage of knowing her well later. He answers her: "Course Ah knowed it! That's how come Ah done it." (197) He is insistent in his wrong doing and perhaps he enjoys it. He does not give up so that he kicks the clothes and says he does not want to see anything that belongs to the whites in his house. Up till now, Sykes has behaved harsly towards Delia that Elijah Moseley, a man from the community, says "Too much knockin' will ruin any 'oman. He done beat huh 'nough tuh kill three women, let 'lone change they looks," said. (200) Sykes has behaved so harsly towards her that he has caused physical changes in her appearance. Hurston puts how a woman who is exposed to violence becomes different in appearance on display: "She was young and soft then, but now she thought of her knotty, muscled limbs, her harsh knuckly hands, and drew herself up into an unhappy little ball in the middle of the big feather bed" (199). Beating and frequent insult have changed Delia in such a degree that she looks older than she is and she is also very tired. Namely, the focus of violence on women by Hurston is clear in almost all her works. Even Lucy, Hurston's the most sagacious female, is exposed to violence by her husband, John in **Jonah's Gourd Vine**.<sup>14</sup> During their marriage, John behaves harshly as well as he can. He slaps Lucy even in her death-bed. Unlike others, Delia's life in "**Sweat**" is more difficult. She endures oppression and at the same time she must work because of bad straits. If we put "sweat" and "oppression" at the same pan of a balance and bring this pan and put on a woman's shoulder, it becomes so difficult to carry. Then, one cannot be surprised Delia's drawing herself into an 'unhappy little ball'. Despite everything she does and being a good wife

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<sup>14</sup> **Jonah's Gourd Vine** is going to be discussed thoroughly in the chapter called 'Education.'

and a good worker, these do not bring Delia any quality and do not help to develop herself. On the other hand, as Hurston says in **Their Eyes Were Watching God** that "...women forget all those things they don't want to remember..."(1) Actually Delia behaves accordingly, too. Although she knows her husband is going around with another woman, Bertha, and despite his domestic violence, she wants to forget all the difficulties she has lived and wants to live in peace. Hurston's women are not obstinate. They all the time search a common path with their men which they can act together. Hurston says in "**Sweat**": "Delia and Sykes fought all the time now with no peaceful interludes. They slept and ate in silence. Two or three times Delia had attempted a timid friendliness, but she was repulsed each time"(202). Despite everything, she shows her patience. She takes a step by hoping that she can cause a difference in Sykes' behaviours. She meets his resistance to peace and obstinacy. Likewise, Janie is a patient woman too. She has accepted Joe's idea that she did not know any stories and she put a scarf on her head as he likes.

When Delia opens her eyes with the new sun rising, she hopes a different day in which she can find peace and happiness. We, as readers, question that what the reason is why Delia has not left him so far now. It finds its answer in Delia's utterance when Sykes brings home a rattlesnake: "Ah hates you Sykes. Ah hates you tuh de same degree dat Ah useter love yuh "(204). Despite everything, she says "I loved you". She loved him very much at one time, but "Fifteen years of misery and suppression had brought Delia to the place where she would hope anything that looked towards a way over or through her wall of inhibitions "(205). Neither can she live the moment nor she can see the future. She comes to a position that she thinks her life is

limited with her house and she also considers that if she becomes happy in life or not will also occur in this house. Like Janie, Delia is a wise woman who knows her husband's weakness and helplessness well. We witnessed that the time Janie understands Jody's weakness, she can adopt an assertive attitude. Here Delia maybe because of her good intention for some time thinks that Sykes behaves like that unwillingly, so she may still love him. At this point, we start to think that there may be another reason why Delia has not left Sykes so far now is that *she cannot*. He in a way has pervaded Delia and she is afraid of him. By her introspection she understands that she does not feel anything positive towards Sykes any more. She thinks "Too late now to hope for love ... too late for everything except her little home. She had built it for her old days, and planted one by one the trees and flowers there. It was lovely to her, lovely. "(199) She regards her marriage years as lost, which have not produced a permanent love. Because of this, she finds peace in nature. She is trying to make her house and garden beautiful. Not Sykes but the garden around her house, which represents her tidiness, her hard working and earning money, will accompany her in old days. In the sense that a woman is trying to make the best of her circumstances, one can remember Antonia Shimerda Cuzak in Willa Cather's well known novel **My Ántonia(1918)**. Like Delia, Antonia " ... can feel herself happy and free totally at nature."<sup>15</sup> At peace with herself in her landscape, she endows the trees around her with human qualities. We know that arranging house and its around well is the characteristics of women kind, so Delia and Antonia

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<sup>15</sup> F. Gül Özyazıcıoğlu, "The Theme Of Self-Actualization In Some Of Willa Cather's Novels" (Unprinted Doctoral Thesis, Atatürk University The Institute of Social Sciences,2000), p.28.

proves us that the efforts of women can make a place beautiful like those.

In '**Sweat**', not a woman but a man who oppresses is useless in such an Eden like place. For her male characters, Hurston wants her readers to take into account that maybe a man is strong or not whether economically or physically, he does not give up oppressing. Sykes cannot put up with her earning money by doing white folks laundry and wants to take the revenge of it. He does not regard her work and weariness, so he wants to show Delia how he is powerful in some way. He hangs around with Bertha and by wandering with her publicly in front of the community and Delia, he wants to demonstrate his power: "Just then Delia drove past on her way home, as Sykes was ordering magnificently for Bertha. It pleased him for Delia to see." (201) Not having ordered anything for Delia, Sykes is very generous to another woman. By doing this, he also takes revenge. So John Lowe's question "What has caused Sykes to seek the beds of other women?"<sup>16</sup> finds its answer when Sykes wants Delia to see him with another woman, but Delia does not give any reaction to her husband's adultery. She only feels compassion for him by thinking that he in a way compensates for his not earning money. We read the story from Delia's point of view, thus we feel close to her. Hurston asserts that "She had brought love to the union and he had brought a longing after the flesh"(198). So we do not want to understand Sykes' feelings.

In fact, if we think deeply, we can see that Hurston's not mentioning any child, which can reflect their sex life, may mean something. Maybe Sykes uses Delia's washing white people's laundry as an excuse for everything, that is mainly sex life, which he cannot find in this marriage.

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<sup>16</sup> John Lowe, **Jump at the Sun**, Urbana, 1994, p.72.

John Lowe asks " only two months into the marriage he beats her. Why?"<sup>17</sup> He shows us the other side of the coin: "Is Delia's fear of the explicitly phallic nature of the snakes a sign of her innate fear of sex or, more likely, a fear that has been beaten into her?"<sup>18</sup> "Delia is frightened of Sykes not only because of his cruelty; he also represents male sexuality ominous in its desire."<sup>19</sup> Walter Thomas, a man from the community says that "Ah sees 'im grinnin' at every 'oman dat passes." (200) We see that Delia could not meet Sykes' sexual desire and Sykes becomes aggressive. Sykes is sexually powerful, on the other hand, Delia is economically powerful. "... he is not man enough to support her; he just preys on her"<sup>20</sup> as she is not woman enough to satisfy her husband. She is just afraid of sex. So Delia thinks that her earning money can cover all the negative points (maybe their sex life, too) in this marriage. On the other hand, Sykes cannot stand not having a real woman in his bed any more. So far now, they have been in need of each other. For this togetherness being unhealthy and out of balance, everything comes to a point that each one cannot endure. Although fifteen years have gone over, there is nothing positive comes to the conclusion. So, they cannot expect anything meaningful from this marriage. If Delia had not been working and Sykes had earned the needed money, the relationship would have been easier and harmonious. The best answer which can be given to the question why they have endured each other for fifteen years is that both of them are defective and they can complete each other. That is to say, their marriage represents the harmony of the lack of harmony.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid; p.72.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid; p.72.

<sup>19</sup> Robert E. Hemenway, **Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography, Urbana, 1977, p.73.**

<sup>20</sup> John Lowe, **Jump at the Sun**, Urbana, 1994, p.74.

Hurston's men frequently look for a chance to attack or insult their women. For example, in "**Sweat**", Sykes says Delia "Ah hates skinny wimmen!"(199) and "You looks jes' lak de devvul's doll-baby tuh me."(204) While humiliating Delia's physical appearance he expresses his own weakness. Sykes cannot put up with Delia's being economically powerful and wants to oppress her in this way. Like Sykes, Joe Starks in **Their Eyes Were Watching God** uses the pet name "doll-baby" for his wife. Similarly, John to Lucy in **Jonah's Gourd Vine**, Logan to Janie in **Their Eyes Were Watching God** and Joe to Missie May in "**The Gilded Six-Bits**" (1933) use the pet name of "L'il Bit". So, we can say that Hurston's men always belittle their wives, minimize their function in their minds and they are all the time in a verbal attack towards their wives.

Whatever the reason is, we see the violence of every kind in "**Sweat**." The climax in it is that when Sykes brings home the rattlesnake which Kathryn Le Seidel describes as a "...satanic object of destruction..."<sup>21</sup> and says that it is a symbol that shows Sykes' "...overcompensation for his 'emasculated' condition as dependent of his wife" economically.<sup>22</sup> It is the straw that broke the camel's back. We as readers, witness that Sykes does not shrink from doing evil of any kind. He has always watched for a chance to take the revenge of her frigidity, but he falls into his own trap. His intention by bringing home it is to send Delia from the house so that he can bring home Bertha. Conversely, the rattlesnake prepares Sykes' end not Delia's. When Sykes is cornered by it, Delia does not come

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<sup>21</sup> Kathryn Le Seidel, **"The Artist in the Kitchen: The Economics of Creativity in Hurston's 'Sweat.'**" **Zora in Florida**, Orlando, 1991, p.118.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid; p.112

to his aid and she stays unreactively to his shouting and beggings. Barbara I. Williams states that "Hurston has pronounced God's judgement on Sykes as he must die as a result of his own wickedness. Delia has been, at least for the present, released from the fear of death by domestic violence."<sup>23</sup>

All the same, men always steal from women in a way whether they are alive or not. Delia's release from repression does not mean a lot. It is maybe only "for the moment". We do not know how her future will be with her background in her mind. On the other hand, the information that we find Delia in silence under a chinaberry tree, which symbolizes rootedness and security at the end of the story shows us her later voice. Until now, she has to preserve her silence because of Sykes and she has to do the duties of man and woman together. Now the new Delia can discover herself thoroughly as a woman and she can eat the fruits of being a woman from now on.

Men represents all the community's voices and we, as readers, witness that community is always there in Hurston's works. She presents it frequently that "sat in judgment."<sup>24</sup> To illustrate, one can see the townspeople commenting on Sykes and Delia's relationship all the time in "**Sweat**". They know everything about them and in their eyes Delia does not deserve Sykes' bad treatment. Although we know that in Hurston's works men's point of views are equal to the community's point of view, we do not believe their sincerity. They approve Sykes's position as a man who does not work and can spend his woman's earning and they

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<sup>23</sup>Barbara L. Williams, **Fall From Eden:God's Judgment in Hurston's "Sweat."** <http://itech.fgcu.edu/faculty/wohlpert/alra/hurston.htm>

<sup>24</sup> Zora Neale Hurston, **Their Eyes Were Watching God**, New York, 1990, p.1.

desire the same for themselves. Similarly, when Janie starts to go out with Tea Cake, "people in judgement" say that dating with a young man is wrong when they are talking about their relationship: "She sits high, but she locks low. Dat's what Ah say 'bout dese ole women runnin' after young boys"(3). The people are unlikely to understand an alone woman and their criticism are harsh and extreme. The same society sees Janie as miserable and helpless when she becomes alone after Joe's death. A woman who wants to live alone, not having got a man or is not under the protection of a man cannot be thought by them either, but Janie will resist against all these happenings that occur outside her. "Her character is temporarily shaped by this environment. Janie becomes a divided self, as inner needs conflict with social (and marital) demands."<sup>25</sup> This society lives in "...a world that imposes artificial distinctions of class, a world that imposes male fantasies of socialization that deny women the right to autonomous decisions."<sup>26</sup> Janie has become an assertive woman and will neglect the notions of the society around her. She must choose between the wishes of her being and those of society's. This is Janie's life after all. She can decide whether she becomes alone or not or she can date a young one or not. In the beginning, her social role limits her from discovering her individual identity, but she struggles against her oppressive environment, struggles to be recognized by the others as a human being and as a woman, so at the end she overcomes the social restrictions and achieves a self-actualized life. She achieves to live by her own rules discovering her inside speaking.

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<sup>25</sup>Peter Messent, **New Readings Of The American Novel: Narrative Theory and its Application**, London, 1990, p.257.

<sup>26</sup>, Robert E. Hemenway, **"The Personal Dimension in Their Eyes Were Watching God."** *New Essays on Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Cambridge , 1990, p.43.



#### 4.0. WOMEN COMING TO CONSCIOUSNESS AND ADOPTING AN ASSERTIVE ATTITUDE

In ***Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937)***, on the deathbed of Joe, Janie for the first time pours out her troubles to him about what they have lived so far and how she feels herself in this marriage. While commenting about her situation in this marriage, Janie does not blame anybody. Her only aim is to present her personality to Joe before too late: "Tain't dat, Jody. Ah ain't here tuh blame nobody. Ah'm just tryin' tuh make you know what kinda person Ah is befo' it's too late"(85). In this context, we can say that Janie follows the right way. She shows her intelligence and development to us again because, it is true that when we define ourselves to others in the full sense, we listen to our inner voice and we can get a vivid knowledge of ourselves through that. So Janie must do that or she cannot find herself and cannot be purified. Her two husbands' making Janie voiceless helps her in a way. Speaking Janie here is mature too, a despised and worthless woman image of Janie starts to fade away. Thus far, Janie has been exposed to both physical and psychological violence, but now she is an individual. However, from the very beginning, we understand from both her conversations with Nanny and her responses to her first husband, Logan Killicks, that Janie is actually not a person who tolerates or will tolerate beating and insulting. There is a questioning manner in her behaviors. She can follow her right when she wants. In the course of the time, she gets mature and learns how to resist, how to say "stop" and how to say "no." She is aware of her own limits and she tells this to the people early or late. She had been married to Joe for twenty years, but it is a pity that he could not

know Janie deeply because he did not permit her to express herself well. Since we knew Janie we have heard her voice in a way. At first she is hoarse-voiced, however, by getting close to herself day by day we start to hear her voice more clearly.

After Joe's death, Janie starts to run the shop by herself. One day in the store she meets with Tea Cake who is free like her and "... seems to be a master of breaking rules and conventions, even inventing night into day, but in an 'even nice' way."<sup>27</sup> Tea Cake is twelve years Janie's junior, as in Hurtson's all marriages in her life time, but can awaken the soul of Janie after some time of flirtation Janie describes her feelings after having a deep friendship with Tea Cake like that: "Once upon uh time, Ah never 'spected nothin' , Tea Cake, but bein' dead from the standin' still and tryin' tuh laugh. But you come long and made somethin' outa me. So Ah'm thankful fuh anything we come through together"(167). From Janie's words we understand that Tea Cake has functioned as the last level in her journey to self-actualization. He is a catalist for Janie's awakening. Actually once upon a time, Janie could not hope for anything, but with the coming of Tea Cake, her life is totally changed. Tea Cake comes and helps to create something in her. By pouring out her inside to Joe on his death-bed, she can start to speak loudly that gives her strength for her later life. "In short, Janie's achievement of verbal power may allow her to become a fully active agent within the community and within her marriage."<sup>28</sup> It is understood from the qoutation that Janie has gained a potential of self-expression. She is no longer a silent and suffering woman. That her early marriages do not bring her

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<sup>27</sup> John Lowe, **Jump at the Sun**, Urbana, 1994, p.180.

<sup>28</sup> Michael Awkward, "Introduction." *New Essays on Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Cambridge, 1990, p.18.

wholeness and happiness teaches her that she has to search her own path and walk on it. Tea Cake brings her a life that is different from what she has lived so far. Janie, " ... who spends most of her life known primarily as someone's wife ... "<sup>29</sup> as Schroeder says, by the help of Tea Cake who teaches her a lot of different things, even how to fire a weapon, starts to discover her skills and thinks that she has a personality. Even though they live together for two years in the journey of her coming to consciousness, Tea Cake's role is great. He presents everything to her to be experienced that she wants to live, so Janie breaks the rules and portrays a woman different from the earlier one. In front of the community, she can even play checkers with Tea Cake, but again like her first two marriages, "Janie lives 'through' Tea Cake in their relationship. Though she participates equally in his life, it is still a union based on a patriarchal model. He takes the decisions; she follows where he leads."<sup>30</sup> Janie is happy with Tea Cake, nonetheless, from the point of view of today, this grade is not enough. It is known that in one's journey to a self-actualized life it is not important others' views but the individuals'. In this context, Janie has achieved her self-actualization.

One can regard the most touching scene of **Their Eyes Were Watching God** when Janie kills Tea Cake by the weapon when he went crazy. " ... setting Tea Cake's actual identity and undeniable worth aside, only after she 'kills'

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<sup>29</sup> Patricia R. Schroeder, "Rootwork: Arthur Flowers, Zora Neale Hurston, and the "literary hoodoo" tradition." **African American Review**, Summer, 2002.

[http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m2838/is\\_1\\_34/ai\\_62258910](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2838/is_1_34/ai_62258910).

<sup>30</sup>Peter Messent, **New Readings Of The American Novel: Narrative Theory and its Application**, London, 1990, p.255.

oppressed versions of herself (married / man-defined woman) can her individual self clearly "crawl forth" as a separate entity."<sup>31</sup>

After Tea Cake's death, Janie returns her hometown and feels experienced and wiser for she has started her own journey alone and reached at the last point she could reach, that is wholeness. She says Pheoby "So Ah'm back home again and Ah'm satisfied tuh be head. Ah done been tuh de horizon and back and now Ah kin set head in mah house and live by comparisons"(191). She is content to live in Eatonville again in view of the fact that she has already lived her dream; she has been to the "horizon and back." Moreover, she knows that the town will gossip behind her back, but she does not care. Janie's fulfillment, as Henry Louis Gates Jr. Says, is a "journey from object to subject".It means a lot. After listening Janie's story, what Pheoby said is very important to the context of the novel: "Ah ain't satisfied wid mahself no mo! Ah means tuh make Sam take me fishin' wid him after this. Nobody better not criticize yuh in mah hearin' "(192).Janie has not only achieved fulfillment but also helps other women feel doubtful about their conditions. As Nellie McKay remarked;

" exchangingly outsideness for individuality within the community, Janie becomes a feminist heroine with an assured place within that community, and her life becomes an influential source through which other women will find a model for their own self-empowerment."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> John Lowe, **Jump at the Sun**, Urbana, 1994, p.194.

<sup>32</sup>Nellie McKay, "'Crayon Enlargements of Life': Zora Neale Hurston's **Their Eyes Were Watching God as Autobiography.**" *New Essays on Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Cambridge, 1990, p.68.

In a way she causes envy without malice among the community's women and also her telling the story to Pheoby gives her strength too: " Since Janie is telling the tale to Pheoby, this becomes her added touch, her "mule story", voiced at last, and also revenge against Jody, who forbade her to attend the ceremony, much less speak of it. "<sup>33</sup> She comes to a point that she can express her story to others. If only Jody sees her telling her story to them.

Similarly, in "**Sweat**" (1926), Delia's reaction to Sykes for the first time is important to the context of the story. It can be appreciated that Hurston knows how to shock her readers well. Delia says "Leoka heah, Sykes, you done gone too fur. Ah been married to you fur fifteen years. Sweat, sweat, sweat! Work and sweat, cry and sweat, pray and sweat! "(198). For years, she has devoted herself to her marriage, wanted to find happiness one day, worked hard to make money and to make her house and garden beautiful. To sum up, she has done her work perfectly in her small world so that her "sweat" is the proof of everything. Sykes has never appreciated her in any way and has always created trouble for her."This new Delia" is speaking, searching her right and wants change in her husband's behaviours. When Delia acts in a defensive and fearless way, Sykes is surprised, withdraws and fears. At first, Hurston draws Delia as an oppressed and voiceless woman but later she makes a revolting woman out of her. Thereupon, the message behind it may be that Hurston warns us, the woman kind, as follows. " ... women can use their creative power to defend themselves against the destruction that is the only intended use of male power."<sup>34</sup> Hurston

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<sup>33</sup> John Lowe, **Jump at the Sun**, Urbana, 1994, p.173.

<sup>34</sup> Kathryn Lee Seidel, "**The Artist in the Kitchen: The Economics of Creativity in Hurston's 'Sweat.'**" Zora in Florida, Orlando, 1991, p.118

maybe wants us to question that women must behave like that or not when it is necessary. If we give men the chance, we cannot overcome the male-dominance. It is the first time in her life that Delia has made a stand against him. At this point, Old Delia is voiceless but new Delia can oppose. She says in a way "I am here", "I do earn money", and "thanks to me, you are able to stay afloat." Delia is quiet and inoffensive like Janie at first but in the course of their marriages and in the process of their becoming a mature person they can discover their voice. New Delia is mature, old enough, experienced enough and knows Sykes enough. She cannot endure this domestic violence any more. Although Sykes want to send Delia out of the house Delia does not give up: "Don't think Ah'm gointuh be run 'way fum mah house neither. Ah'm goin' tuh de white folks bout you, mah young man, de very nex' time you lay yo' han's on me. Mah cup is done run ovah"(204). Delia adopts an assertive attitude towards Sykes and also she finds enough strength in her to threaten him.

As to talk about the topic 'women's coming to consciousness' in Hurston's works, one can also remember Hurston's well-known short story "**The Gilded Six-Bits**" (1933) in which we witness the happy time of a happy couple, Missie May and Joe. Hurston opens the scene by saying that "IT WAS A NEGRO YARD around a Negro house in a Negro settlement ..."<sup>35</sup> She wants her readers to read the story by not neglecting that these people are Negro and everything happens around them. Missie May, one can say that Hurston's the most intrepid female character, loves her husband Joe very much. She and her husband have invented a game that only belongs to them. This game is

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<sup>35</sup> Alice Walker, **I Love Myself When I Am Laughing ... And Then Again When I Am Looking Mean and Impressive**, New York, 1999, p.208.

interesting and also meaningful to the context of the story. That "friendly game," his throwing dollars in the door for her to pick up, means how money becomes important for these Negro people in their everyday life and what it symbolizes. This couple loves each other very much and lives a peaceful life. They live their sex abundantly, too. One day after Joe has come home, they play their game again and have sex. Then, Joe asks Missie May to prepare something to eat and he starts to describe her how to make it. What Missie May says as an answer to Joe is very important: "Don't you mess wid mah business, man. You git in yo' clothes. Ah'm a real wife, not no dress and breath. Ah might not look lak one, but if you burn me, you won't git a thing but wife ashes"(210). That she expresses herself as "a real wife" shows us that how much Missie may trusts her womanhood so much. She has just got up from the bed and it is normal for her to use such kind of words. In addition, she has adopted her traditional woman roles as cooking and pleasing her husband. "Being a wife means what it has traditionally meant: washing the clothes, cooking the food, providing sex, having children (preferable boys) and loving it."<sup>36</sup> So as long as Missie May fulfills her conventional roles, she can trust herself. After Joe has a bath, they have their dinner. At diner, they enjoy themselves, make jokes, laugh a lot. "Hurston describes their dinner lovingly and deliciously, in an effort to portray the healthy satisfaction of appetite that the marriage represents."<sup>37</sup> Suddenly, Joe starts to talk about a man, Mister Otis D.Slemmons, the owner of the ice-cream

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid; p.175.

Janie also actually accepts these traditional roles unwillingly as Hurston's other heroines. They even do not think once a time in their lives if they are obligatory to do those or not.

<sup>37</sup> John Lowe, **Jump at the Sun**, Urban, 1994, p.75.

At this point, one may remember the relationship of Janie and Tea Cake.

parlor, who "... has got a five-dollar gold piece for a stick-pin and he got a ten-dollar gold piece on his watch chain and his mouf is jes' crammed full of gold teethes"(211). Joe envies Slemmons' having slept with a lot of women. He wants to show his power 'as a man' too when he wants Missie May to get dressed well: "Ah wants you to be one de first ladies to walk in dere and have same set down "(210). It is understood that Joe starves for richness, glory and showing off. He wants his townspeople to see his beautiful wife that is the indicator of his power. Joe's desire for Slemmons' gold and Missie May's desire to make her husband rich prepare their end. She thinks that Joe deserves every beautiful thing in the world and wants her husband to feel himself better near a rich man. Missie May is a watchful woman. She can read the thoughts that passes through Joe's mind. She loves Joe deeply and so she sacrifices herself:

"The single scene in which Joe finds his wife in bed with Slemmons is doubly framed, architecturally by the doorway and perceptually by Joe's gradual sensual awareness. When Joe makes his surprise visit home and steps over the doorsill of his bedroom, he slowly realizes what is happening and, framed by the doorway, feels 'eternity' stand 'still'."<sup>38</sup>

Missie May determines to have a sex with Slemmons for getting Joe's desires. At this time Joe comes and sees the scene. His reaction is very interesting; he neither shouts nor beats nor shoots, but he onl stands stil and laughs. He

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<sup>38</sup> Rosalie Murphy Baum, " **The Shape Of Hurston's Fiction**" Zora in Florida, Orlando, 1991, p.101.



also lets Slemmons go away. Joe puts Slemmons' watch in his pocket and goes to bed. Missie May cries a lot. After this event, they stay in the same house but they become estranged from each other. "Missie knew why she didn't leave Joe. She couldn't. She loved him too much, but she could not understand why Joe didn't leave her. He was polite, even kind at times, but aloof"(216). Why Joe does not leave her is actually the answer of how much he loves her, too. He shares much of the responsibility of her mistake, because he knows that he has motivated Missie for betraying him. They realize that the coins are not gold-pieces, but they are only gilded half-dollars. This realization "proves liberating, for Joe and Missie May understand now how wrong they were to yearn for the gold Slemmons represented."<sup>39</sup> She did her adultery so that her husband can overcome his inferiority complex that is caused by not having a lot of money like Mr. Slemmons, but

"For Missie May, the journey begins with the onset of supposing what life would be like for her and her husband if they owned the kind of 'gold' that the city man flaunted; the journey ends with the realization that fleeting gilded tokens are cheap, useless, and even damaging when one's life is traded for illusion."<sup>40</sup>

Her love and devotion to her husband put her in this condition, but Missie May is a courageous female who rebels against society's rules for money when she sleeps with another man. She follows simply her own instincts. She does

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<sup>39</sup> John Lowe, **Jump at the Sun**, Urbana, 1994, p.77.

<sup>40</sup> Evora W. Jones, **The Pastoral and the Picaresque in Zora Neale Hurston's 'The Gilded Six-Bits'**, **College Language Association Journal** 35 (March 1992): p.319.

an action that is unacceptable for a woman in that community. So one can regard that the moral of this marital story is that all that glitters is not gold and this story shows the aftermaths of materialism in the rural South during the Great Depression. Especially Missie May is unable to see the reality and unable to resist the appeal of gold and she ruins her marriage. At last, both Missie May and Joe gain knowledge and have an awareness of their fault. They are now sorry for their greed. They remember their old happy days and try to enliven their marriage. 'The Slemmons' period' has gone over.

#### 4.1. RELIGION/ WOMEN CLOSE TO GOD

Hurston's women often cling to their faith in God in order to be able to endure the hardships of life and their faith in Him guides and protects them from men oppression. For instance, Delia in "**Sweat**" (1926) is one of them. The minutes that she spends when she is close to God are so important for her that she says Sykes " Ah got mah letter fum de church an' moved mah membership tuh Woodbridge-so Ah don't haftuh take no sacrament wid yuh 'roun' me atall"(204). She wants to be with God seperately and she takes her membership apart from Sykes' church. She is a believer that Hurston frequently shows her when she is praying and endorsing Sykes over to God. To illustrate, when she finds the snake out of the basket and it stirs vigorously, she says herself with a short period of 'introspection' and 'retrospection' that "well, Ah done de bes' Ah could. If things aint right, Gawd knows taint mah fault"(206) and she goes to sleep. Could you imagine yourself going to sleep when a rattlesnake is around? Actually, Delia succeeds this. Before this, the readers have already known that Delia often goes to church in order to be purified and to take strength from God. When Sykes goes on looking for trouble, Delia, as a woman close to God, does not want any disscussion since she has just come from church. She says "Ah ain't for no fuss t'night Sykes. Ah just come from taking sacrament at the church house"(198). One can say that Delia can endure all the negative things thanks to her faith. Her faith in God makes her life meaningful and gives her strength to search for her peace. Delia believes the justice of God deeply and

until now she has prayed in silence and wanted everything positive from Him:

"Somehow, before sleep came, she found herself saying aloud: "Oh, well, whatever goes over the Devil's back, is got to come under his belly. Sometime or rather, Syke, like everybody else, is gointer reap his sowing." After that she was able to build a spiritual earthworks against her husband. His shells could no longer reach her. Amen" (199).

She is an ignorant woman and she prays innocently with all her heart. She feels that God will punish Sykes sooner or later. At last, God presents her the freedom so that Sykes gets his comeuppance and becomes the victim of his own wickedness, but this comes in a strange way. As Lowe points out:

"Delia's Christian righteousness, evident in the scene when she returns from a 'Love Feast' at church, also seems challenged by her failure to seek help for Sykes after he has been bitten by the snake at the end of the story and by her deliberate showing herself to him so he will know what he attempted and that there is no hope for him."<sup>41</sup>

Before all, Delia is a human being and she also wants to take revenge. On the other hand, one can regard that God gives her this opportunity. He has protected her so far and now He is saving her from Sykes' devil-like hands.

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<sup>41</sup> John Lowe, **Jump at the Sun**, Urbana, 1994, p.74.

In her works, Hurston always wants to send the message that if a person finds 'oneself' it means he/she has found the God besides. She clearly says it by using Janie as a messenger. Janie says "two things everybody's got tuh do fuh theyselves. They got tuh God, and they got tuh find out about livin' fuh theyselves"(192). Janie thinks in a person's life to believe in God is a very important thing. If someone does not believe in Him and does not take a step towards Him, she/he cannot become successful in life and cannot find herself/himself as a human being in life. As a consequence, Janie comes to a position that she wants to send the message to the women race and generally to all human beings: 'the wisdom of life', which she has learned as a result of her experiences in life. We witness that like Delia, Janie is a believer, too. She claims that women are close to God and she informs it to the men:

"Sometimes God gits familiar wid us womenfolks too and talks His inside business. He told me how surprised He was 'bout y'all is goin' tuh be if you ever find out you don't know half as much 'bout us as you think you do. It's so easy to make yo'self out God Almighty when you ain't got nothin' tuh strain against but women and chickens"(75).

She is so pure in her thoughts and feelings that she thinks she speaks with Him. Indeed, "Janie did what she had never done before, that is, thrust herself into the conversation."(75) God inside of her gives her strength to speak at last. Like Janie and Delia, Lucy's religiousness in **Jonah's Gourd Vine (1934)** gives her physical and mental

endurance to put up with her husband's adultery and other misbehaviours. As a young girl, Lucy is also a person like Delia who goes to church regularly. At church, she also takes an active role of singing in the choir. In order to see Lucy a lot John, her future husband, starts to go to church continually.

Hurston pictures a woman like Janie who is trying to find strength in herself and to accept herself as a human being first and then as a woman in **Seraph On The Suwanee (1948)** too. Arvay, the protagonist, is also a woman like Janie and Delia who is close to God. Arvay, at twenty one, is a spinster according to her social environment. What she lives in this spinsterhood period affects her later life so that she firstly devotes herself to the religion in order to escape the difficulties of being a spinster in the society. Hurston asserts that;

"Arvay, young and white, and teasing to the fancy of many men, had got up in church on First Sunday, Communion Day, and announced that she was through with the world and its sinful and deceitful ways. She solemnly said that she had given her whole heart and her life to the work of God"(4).

Arvay is an attractive woman who has influence on men. Unlike other young girls of the town, she turns her back to the world and starts to share her inside with God, and this is appreciated by people. For instance, when Reverend Middleton comments on her, he says "This young girl's devotion to the cause of Christ makes me feel ashamed"(5). This is a very rare thing for young ones that people wish all the girls can feel as Arvay.

Arvay is a girl who has lack of self-worth and one can say that Lorraine, Arvay's sister and life long rival, marries earlier than Arvay with a man, Carl whom she thinks that loves her, is the primary source of her inferiority complex. Arvay thinks that she is loved by Carl but cannot express anything about it to anyone. "Not a soul in Sawley suspected this secret life of Arvay's." (12) Hurston here points out that women, firstly because of the oppression of men in their lives, make feel-obliged to develop inner monologues. No one in the town knows anything about Arvay's inner world, but she lives impassive inside her.

One day, Arvay is also courted in spite of all she has done in order not to be caught by the appeals of the world again. She meets Jim Meserve who is a handsome man that all the girls in the town want to marry, but he falls in love with Arvay. As a wise man, he understands her inconfidence and wants to help her to overcome her inferiority complex. He thinks there is no reason for her to think like that. Her being a poor girl and spinsterhood do not matter for him. When Jim says he wants to marry her, Arvay does not believe his sincerity because of her low degree of self-regard. She says: "You know that you just want to make game of me!" (16). Arvay's unhappiness is so deep and she is so inconfident as a girl that she cannot trust him. On the other hand, she enjoys the people's looking at them, when she is walking with Jim on the Big Road: "Arvay had her ego nourished by the envious looks from single women and courting girls. ... right in front of all those jealous girls ... " (20). The timid, alone and religious Arvay's womanly feeling awakens with the entering of Jim into her life. Before that, she has felt deep love to her sister's husband, but she has had to suppress her feelings. For a long time, she feels guilty because of her

feelings to Carl, but deciding to share a life with a man like Jim, she starts her journey. Like Janie, in **Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937)**, Arvay sets off a journey to find "herself". In her marriage, by the help of Jim, Arvay can know herself and overcome her complexes as Janie did by the help of Tea Cake.

Hurston does not write Jim and Arvay's courtship in detail, and we do not know more about Jim's background and his thoughts. He only puts forth his thought about women for consideration before their marriage:

"Women folks don't have no mind to make up nohow. They wasn't made for that. Lady folks were just made to laugh and act loving and kind and have a good man to the for them all he's able, and have him as many boy-children as he figgers he'd like to have, and make him so happy that he's willing to work and fetch in every dad-blamed thing that his wife thinks she would like to have. That's what women are made for" (25).

To Jim, women cannot take care of themselves, and as they have not got brains, men have to think for them. Having a conventional point of view, he thinks women should only perform their traditional roles such as giving birth to boy children. He sees women as objects that according to him women beings only laugh, love and make her environment happy. He does not want to see that they also have souls. What Jim especially wants is to present everything to his woman and can see her appreciation. He wants a woman who can accept her man unconditionally and who is always near her man to praise his manhood and deeds. Unfortunately,



Arvay does not give answer to his desires in the course of their marriage.

Once they are married, they have three children. Their first child, Earl, is an ill and defective child that Arvay accuses herself for this. She thinks "This is the punishment for the way I used to be. I thought that I had done paid off, but I reckon not. I never thought it would come like this, but must be the chastisement I been looking for"(69). According to Arvay, it is the punishment of God to her because of her mental adultery with Carl. What she has lived up to now are not easy. Conversely, she cannot communicate her feelings to anyone. Psychological struggles of Arvay after the birth of Earl get greater. On the top of everything, she suffers a lot because of not giving a healthy child to Jim. That she does not fully express herself in words explicitly causes all the problems. As the novel progresses, Arvay's melancholy gets bigger and as Jim becomes wealthy and rises socially, her inconfidence increases. Having become deeply sensitive Arvay,

"thought that it would be herself when and if she could birth Jim a perfect child and by this means tie him forever to her. Jim felt that he would stand on the mount of transfiguration when Arvay showed some appreciation of his love as expressed by what he was striving to do for her. Thus they fumbled and searched for each other in silent darkness"(76-77).

From the beginning of their marriage they have not achieved communication. Arvay and Jim cannot come together to talk things out because of their sorrow for Earl, but in this hard process, Arvay's habit of talking to herself, as

Janie's inside speaking, gives her strength in order to put up with the difficulties that comes along with the birth of Earl.

The turning point in Arvay's life is when she becomes alone with the death of Earl. Her other children have also grown up. Angelina, her daughter, has also married a good man and Kenny, her son, has gone to be a musician. Jim is off home so much with his boats, too. So "she felt unnecessary" (253) at this time, she is alone again. She expresses her feelings like that: "You never is known the feeling I got right now. All the little family I done got together is gone and done left me in one way or another"(239). She starts to think whom she serves for from now on. As she has not given regard to her private life, she cannot be sufficient to herself now. Hurston describes her position with these words: "Arvay had no arrangements for spending idle time. She did not read things, and was not even given to fancy-work. Her life had been patterned to serve and now there was nobody for her to wait on do for "(244). Arvay's mother dies and Jim decides to spend some time apart from her. While she feels herself worthy with the presence of others, in this loneliness Arvay realizes that she is an alone individual. However, the question of the book is, as John Lowe remarked, whether Arvay can learn to serve herself by loving herself or not. Hurston here wants us to think that as women, people should first learn how to love and respect themselves and then to learn to like and cherish others. Arvay, because of her psychological problems, has not been capable of loving and serving herself and Jim as he has done her over the years.

The serving woman image of Arvay is fading away slowly. Arvay's reconciliation with herself, her self-awakening comes when she decides to submit what Jim wants.

All she wants is to be unique for Jim but she does not know how to succeed it. Coming to the point of understanding Jim, she starts to meet what he wants, tries to harmonize with him and by this way she finds "herself" at the end of her journey of "being oneself". What she wants now is also what Jim has wanted so far. At this point, one can say that Arvay does not carry any characteristics of a feminist as she comes to a point of identifying herself on Jim's terms. As a consequence of this, they succeeds to live a real relationship. A female fulfillment occurs when she discovers her husband's desires and starts to act in that way.

By contrast, Janie finds herself and accepts herself as a woman, when she becomes equal to a man, Tea Cake, in a mutually respectful relationship. With the coming of Tea Cake and in the course of their marriage, Janie could do everything that a man can do in everyday life. As a consequence, one can say that the wholeness and happiness come to both women by different ways.

#### 4.2. EDUCATION

By contrast to Arvey and Delia respectively, Hurston presents a different woman in **Jonah's Gourd Vine (1934)**, her first novel, produced in four months when the author was forty-two. The story especially focuses on John Pearson's rise from a poor, illiterate boyhood to the powerful, well-to-do moderator of the Florida Baptist Convention and results in his subsequent fall from power and grace, and his painful resurrection and death. Lucy, his wife, is a faithful and betrayed woman who fulfills the roles of a wife, a mother and maybe a friend at the same time for her husband. She is like an authority who always gives some kind of advice to her husband. Like a mother to her husband John, she waits in silence and watches John to become mature without getting bored. As the novel begins, we understand that John is an illegitimate son. The fact that another man's blood runs through his veins, his stepfather, Ned often picks fights with him. John works hard in the cotton fields on their sharecropping tract, but he cannot please his stepfather. John always wonders what life is like on the other side of the tracks. One day, when he comes to the point of being distressed by his step father, he runs away from home to see the other side. When he moves across the bridge, he sees children going to school and he firstly sees Lucy at teh age of thirteen there. He asks children if they know how to find Marse Alf Pearson, John's own father. Lucy speaks up, so even in her first speaking, she puts forth her educative side for consideration:

"Marse Alf! Don't y' all folksees over de creek know slavery time is over? 'Tain't no mo' Marse Alf, no Marse Charlie, nor Marse Tom neither.

Folks whut wuz borned in slavery time go 'round callin' dese white folks Marse but we been born since freedom. We call 'em Mister. Dey don't own nobody no mo'"(14).

Lucy reminds John that the slavery time is over and people are not the property of another person. They have gained their individual freedom and there is nobody superior than one another. She says they are the children of freedom and they should act accordingly in order not to go back to those times.

Although the ladies on the Pearson estate show too much interest in John because of his light skin and being a handsome man, she chooses Lucy. Alf Pearson encourages him to attend the school. John admits because he can become close to Lucy there. He studies hard to impress her. She falls in love with John, too. On the other hand, when John wants to marry her, Lucy's mother, Emmeline violently opposes to this marriage. She wants to direct Lucy to a rich husband in a way. In this regard, Emmeline resembles Nanny in **Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937)** who wants her grandchild to marry a rich man, Logan Killicks. When her mother starts to talk about Artie Mimos, a man with sixty acres and two mules (rich in their view), Lucy refuses: "Whut Ah keer how many mules he got paid fuh? Ah ain't speclain' tuh live wid no mules. You try in' tuh kill me wid talk. Don't keer whut yuh say. Ahm gointer marry John dis night, God bein' mah helper"(77). In that case, we find Lucy more intelligent than Janie. Lucy is a determined character who knows what she wants. Unlike Lucy, Janie is deceived by Nanny and she marries with Logan. Conversely, Lucy does not need to live an evolution like Janie to understand that living with mules or to become a mule for a

man does not bring anything to anyone. She can oppose and by this way she can start to live by her own rules.

Lucy and John marries, then they move to Eatonville. In Eatonville, because of his strong speaking skill, people want John to preach the Gospel. In other words, in a short time he succeeds in drawing the public attention easily. As Hurston states in her autobiography **Dust Tracks On A Road (1942)** that Eataville is " ... a town all out of colored people. It seemed like a good place to go "(9). Eatonville is a town all of whose inhabitants are Afro-American. Lucy shares the same thought with Hurston that it is an advantage for a black to live in that town:

"John, dis is uh fine place tuh bring up our chillun. Dey won't be seein' no other kind uh folks actin' top-superior over 'em and dat'll give 'em spunk tuh be bell cows theyselves, and you git somethin' tuh do 'sides takin' orders offa other folks. Ah 'bominates dat. "(109)

There is nobody to behave superior to her children in Eatonville and her children can improve "self" and "personality" that are very important to Lucy. Lucy foreshadows that here, her husband is going to mature like a child, too. In the course of the novel, her advice to John about his job and friends become so rigid that John is frieghtened when Lucy says: "And now less don't pay Joe Clarke no mo' rent. Less buy dis place, John." John expresses in terror that " dat's uh bigger job than Ah wants tuh tackle, Lucy. You so big-eyed. Wese colored folks. Don't be so much-knowin' "(109). She does not want to pay rent and desires to buy a house, but from John's point of view, a negro person cannot be so ambitious and he must

know how far he can go. Lucy does not want those labels and she knows the limits of a person's capabilities and capacity. He is not so courageous and ambitious as Lucy, but she has confidence in him so that he can do whatever he wants.

Lucy's character is particularly strong throughout the story, but John has a lot of defects. He is unfaithful to Lucy. He cannot resist the appeals of other women so that he deceives Lucy several times. One day, when she finds letters in the house written by Hattie Tyson, a conjure woman, who wants to keep John at her side, she says to John " If you keep ole Hattie Tyson's letters out dis house where mah chillun kin git holt of 'em and you kin stop folkses mouf by comin' on home instid uh layin' 'round wid her in Oviedo " (128). She does not want her children to know their father's infidelity. She insists on her and especially her children's rights. In this regard, from the beginning Lucy is a talking and assertive woman unlike Janie and Delia. She does not need to experience awakening.

"John deserts Lucy in child birth, abandons his infant daughter as she nearly dies of typhoid, strikes his wife and threatens to kill her if she ever practises the marital double standart that he exploits."<sup>42</sup> To John, women only perform their conventional roles and do not grumble. They should endure all the difficulties and do not complain. In her difficult times, John is not with her side. Lucy is always alone when their children are growing. Lucy actually suffers a lot in this marriage, but one cannot only accuse

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<sup>42</sup> Gary Ciuba, " The Worm Against the Word: The Hermeneutical Challenge in Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine*" **African American Review**, Spring, 2000.

[http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m2838/is\\_1\\_34/ai\\_62258910](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2838/is_1_34/ai_62258910).

John because of having a light skin and being a handsome man which are the presents of God to him. In front of this beauty, women cannot control themselves. Besides, as Lowe asserts:

"Although as readers we disapprove of John's many infidelities, we need to remember that time and time again women throw themselves at him, suggesting that Hurston wants us to recognize that women have sexual drives as well, that they too can choose to exercise choice and go out seeking partners, and that men, just like women, may be viewed as sexual objects. On the other hand, some of these women, particularly Mehaley, seem to genuinely love John."<sup>43</sup>

John's status in society is high. He is a preacher and the townspeople see him as their spiritual guide, but he appears to be a man who lusts after many women. His desire for women is uncontrollable as women's. In this context, one can say Hurston wants to point out that these temptations are the common characteristics of human nature. John is a human being and it is normal for him to make mistakes, too. Although he hurts Lucy over and over again, he does not leave her because of his real love for her. He knows he is doing wrong but he cannot seem to help himself.

Lucy gives too much importance to education, especially to a woman's education. Even in her death-bed she says her daughter Isie:

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<sup>43</sup> John Lowe, **Jump at the Sun**, Urbana, 1994, p.108.



" stop cryin', you can't hear whut Ahm sayin', 'member tuh git all de education you kin. Dat's de onliest way you kin keep out from under people's feet. You always strain tuh be de bell cow, never be de tail uh nothin'. Do de best you kin, honey, 'cause neither yo' paw nor dese older chillun is goin' tuh be bothered too much wid yuh, but you goin' tuh git 'long"(130).

Lucy has a distinctive personality and wants her children to be like that. Maybe, she thinks that if she hadn't attended school and hadn't known the religion, she could not have endured all the difficulties of life that God gave to her. She wants Isie to know that everybody should take care his/her life for his/her own sake. Nobody does help anyone. One should build his/her life by his/her own rules and act accordingly. Lucy advices her daughter that the society in which they are living is likely to victimize a young negro girl, so she must be careful and zealous to achieve success as much as she could to have a secure position in life. Although Nanny in **Their Eyes Were Watching God** defines security as marriage, Lucy regards it as education and success. Lucy goes on: "Don't you love nobody better 'n you do yo'self. Do, you'll be dying befo' yo' time is out"(130). As a modernist writer Hurston here sets the criteria of love. According to her, one should love and respect himself/herself first and then others. She sums up the cause of her early death and she accuses John. Her love for John has directed her to tolerate all his faults. What she has lived in this marriage so far now is the source of everything. If she had lived a peaceful life, she would not have been ill so early.

As a consequence, in **Jonah's Gourd Vine**, we witness the oppression of a dominant woman, Lucy. Her husband John uses her as a step in his road to maturity. Being a mother and a friend to him she educates John, but after her death he understands that he always needs her and he actually loved her. He wants her lover side and wisdom all the time near him. We have pointed out that Hurston's women are close to God. So, one may think that because God punishes the sinners, He eventually destroys John, too. John lives an immortal life when he is supposed to be a commonly role model as a pastor. He does not deserve Lucy, so the early death of her is the God's punishment to him and when he deceives his third wife, Sally, with another woman the early death of him comes as the justice of God.

Patience is a virtue that is one of the characteristics of most women. Hurston portrays patient women in her works. Among her women characters, it is clear that Lucy is the most patient. Throughout the novel, one comes to the conclusion that being patient is hard but very rewarding thing. As a patient woman Lucy bears all the adulteries of her husband's. Although she knows her husband's all misbehaviours and deception, she all the time advises him in order to help him to become mature. On the other hand, maybe as John Lowe states in **Jump at the Sun** "... her loving forgiveness of his sins simultaneously creates a never ending source of guilt" (87-88). It has become a routine that John makes mistakes and Lucy forgives. As a result of her patience, John understands the reality of life even if not in her life time. He becomes mature and appreciative of Lucy's value after her death.

## 5.0. CONCLUSION

It is the early twentieth century and the slavery time has ended in America more than half a century ago, but the African-American man has not come over his inferiority complex near the whites yet. For him, it will be a long process to forget the master-slave relationship, so he wants to maintain it in his house. He starts to act as if he is the white master and her wife is his slave. Equally, he gives the biggest damage to his weak and voiceless wife. He is physically abusive and the society in which they live is also an oppressive patriarchy that primarily neglects women's private lives. Marriage is considered as an institution under patriarchal control and women are supposed to act according to the standard gender roles. Women have to live in a world that does not see them and treat them as equals. They are caged by the chains of society. As a consequence of this, for a life time, black women understand that they are not in total control of their lives.

In this study, it is tried to make clear how Hurston successfully presents the role of women at a time when they have no voice. Her works discussed in this study reflect her point of view about women well. The main characters in her works are generally women and one can witness her different comments about women's positions. She depicts heroines who have very different situations, but the one common thread they share is the different kinds of struggles they have gone through in their lives.

Hurston wants women to have some virtue such as patience, tolerance, industriousness and she wish to see them morally upright, optimistic towards future and always

hopeful for life. She wants the women who are exposed to domestic violence to be courageous and strong to get out of their humiliated positions. In the same manner, she believes that it is high time for women to express themselves, to realize their full potential and to find the lost identity of themselves, for she defends the equality of the sexes. At the beginning, Hurston's women have not enough self-knowledge to express themselves well. Gradually, they start to understand men's weakness and make a stand against their destructive tendencies, so one can say that like Arvay in **Seraph On The Suwanee (1948)** and Missie May in **"The Gilded Six-Bits" (1933)** they realize their self through the people around themselves. Hurston makes her characters fight against abuse and lastly they find strength in themselves to get out of domestic violence and bad-mannered husbands. When women announce the freedom of their volition, they take the first step to a self-actualized life at the same time.

At the very beginning of **Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937)**, before even introducing us the heroine of the novel, Janie, Hurston generalizes all women by saying: "Now, women forget all those things they don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly." (1) Maybe the message Hurston generally wants to send in Janie's character is that it is not the story of only Janie, but the whole African-American women or women in general. Hurston wishes that all of them could do what Janie has managed and maybe she wants consolation by finding an answer to that: 'Do they (all African-American women) become wiser a bit late like Janie?' Actually, women can set off their journey of "being oneself" a bit late because of the male oppression and the community. Hurston

also regards that everything begins by dreaming. She wants women to start by dreaming and she thinks what they dream will become favourable to them. Hurston, on the one hand, pictures women like Nanny who cannot find themselves in the slavery time and on the other hand she pictures women like Janie and Lucy who can reach at the bottom of themselves and can voice their feelings in the twentieth century, so we witness the progress of black females from the days of slavery to the present.

Hurston sees that there is something women have not expressed yet. She could see that women have secret languages and she says they should speak women's language and go away from using men's language. In other words, they should not accept what men say without thinking. Hurston gives importance to women's verbal performance. She makes her female characters speak in some ways. Actually, some of her women sing well and they tell stories, too. To illustrate, Delia in **"Sweat"** (1926) sings when she is alone and Janie in **Their Eyes Were Watching God** tells stories inside her. Hurston sees that survival of a female can only be managed by adopting an assertive behavior to the oppressive men and to the environment. Although external forces and circumstances may demand sacrifice and suffering, she wants women to assert their freedom, express themselves and sing and tell aloud.

Hurston's women are always close to God. They believe in Him, wait in silence and at last the justice of God becomes manifest and they are rewarded in a way. Janie finds herself by living with a man like Tea Cake, who makes possible her joining the society. In **Jonah's Gourd Vine** (1934) Lucy, helpful for her husband and lover John with her advice in her life time, becomes meaningful and

valuable for him even after her death and he becomes in need of her again.

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