

Their eyes were watching god: psychoanalytical perspective

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A Prospectus: Reading Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* from a Psychoanalytical Perspective
Psychoanalytic theory has shown that infants start identifying themselves and recognize that they are individuals, separate from their mothers, at six months of age. At that age, the individuals' own identity starts to form as they relate their reflection in the mirror to their own self. This is when texts such as *Their Eyes Were Watching God* become relevant.

The protagonist, Janie Crawford, struggles to construct her own identity and experiences a severe sense of loss in her childhood. Meanwhile, Janie recognizes her African American identity through her projection in the picture in respect to Lacan's Mirror Stage. The projection of Janie's identity in the picture as a child not only makes her realize her black origin, but also identify her sexuality as she can only, initially, identify her dress and her hair.

This delayed self-recognition disrupts Janie emotionally and explains her inability to maintain a successful marriage throughout the novel. Freud's psychoanalysis suggests that any disruption in one of the stages of development will negatively result in failure in one or more of the individual's aspect of life (Bertens 158), which is evident in the novel. Even though Janie goes through the stages of development depicted in both Lacan and Freud's theories, Janie starts going through these stages later in her childhood, at six years old.

According to Lacan's Mirror Stage (2010), in the first six months, the infant does not distinguish his own self from that of his parents or even the world

around him. However, they can only identify that the images in the mirror, or any other projection, like the picture in Janie's case, when they are about eighteen months old. This delay in Janie's development is related to the social and familial issues that Janie has experienced in her childhood. The first encounter of the infant with the self in the mirror forms an "Ideal-I" in which the infant will derive all subsequent future identifications.

The infant encounters both attraction to the image and aggression towards it over the difficulty of controlling it, which carries over into future identifications (Lacan 2010). Janie's misrecognition, or lack of recognition, of herself in the picture is due to her need to construct a sense of reality and make sense of the unusual circumstances in her upbringing. Janie recognizes that her specular self contradicts her real self, or in this sense, the self that she has created through her social environment and identification with the white children.

Even though Janie had a delayed recognition of herself, she experienced her first sexual fantasy under the pear tree at the age of sixteen, which Freud identifies as the genital stage of psychosexual development that happens in adolescence when those urges and desires are awakened (Garcia 1995). Janie does not encounter delays in her genital stage, however, she goes through Cathexis in her desperate attempt to let down of her hair, which is a crucial symbol of her sexuality throughout the novel.

Most researchers have examined Janie's sexual orientation and feminine identity through the symbols of the pear tree, the mule, and her hair (Dilbeck 2008). They have also identified her realization of her womanhood and her

constant search for love through her three marriages (Bealer 2009, Clarke 2001, and Matos Ayala 2001). Researchers have also pointed out that Janie has successfully established her identity through using her voice, which allowed her readers to visualize the narrative (Burrows 2001, Haurykiewicz 1997, and Lancaster 2009).

However, critics have overlooked the development of Janie's identity throughout the novel in the context of Lacan's Mirror Stage and Freud's psychosexual stages of development. Understanding Janie's delayed identity development, suppressed sexual desires, and her unusual social environment help to better identify her inability to maintain a successful marriage and explain her underlying sexual behavior. The purpose of this paper is two-fold.

First, this research suggests that Janie's incapability of having successful emotional bonds with the males in her life can be understood through the analysis of her delayed identity recognition in respect to Lacan's Mirror Stage. Second, Janie's suppressed sexual desires that stems from the patriarchal society can be the reason for her to release these desire into an object that symbolizes her sexuality, in this case her hair.

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