

Love in their eyes were watching god

[Literature](#), [American Literature](#)



In Zora Neale Hurston's novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the reader sees one character's journey towards figuring out love. Janie Crawford, the protagonist, deciphers through experience what love actually is. Through her text, Hurston discusses love versus independence and speech versus silence. The theme of love versus independence emerges from the start of the novel. Janie Crawford, an attractive, dreamy child then confident woman, first lives with her grandmother, Nanny. Because of her upbringing in slavery, Nanny's view of love is skewed to be all about security, especially financially. After experiencing slavery and poverty, Nanny wants Janie to find a partner who can care for and provide for her. Janie sees love differently when she looks at a pear tree one day. She saw a "dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from root to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight. So this was a marriage!" (Hurston 11). The tree needed the bee and the bee needed the tree. Both things in the relationship had a purpose and helped to strengthen the other. Without each other, neither would thrive. Janie saw love and marriage as a bond between people who strengthen each other and bring out the best in each other. Each person would care for the other and look out for what they needed and wanted. Without the other, neither of the couple could survive. Throughout the text, the significance of the image of the bee and pear tree are seen as Janie makes her way through multiple husbands. Nanny realizes the necessity of setting up Janie's first marriage when she sees her kissing Johnny Taylor under the pear tree. After, "that was the end of her childhood" (12) because Nanny had her first husband in mind, Logan Killicks. Kissing

under the pear tree, Janie felt innocent, like a child. However, she quickly had to become a woman, entering into her first marriage. The man could offer Janie money and protection, the most important qualities in a marriage according to her grandmother. Even though Janie begged her to not have to go through with it, Janie was obedient. She did as she was told, and married Logan. Janie visits Nanny to ask for advice, worried that she will never love Logan. Nanny claims that marriage will create love. She says that Janie should appreciate Logan's wealth and status, and that by living together, she would learn to love him and be thankful for him. A year passes, and Janie still feels no love for Logan. " She knew now that marriage did not make love" (24). Disillusioned, Janie gives up hope of ever loving Logan. In addition, her husband stops " talking in rhymes to her" (25) and tries to get her to perform manual labor, claiming that she is spoiled. Logan begins to order her to help with the farm work, and Janie says that he expects her to worship him but that she never will. She believes that a loving relationship should have the two people on equal levels, both helping each other to bring out the best in each other. Here, she moves on to her next husband, thinking at first how different he is, but ironically, will not truly respect her, claiming ownership over her and placing her on a lower level than he. Janie's second husband, Joe Starks, has big dreams that excite her, and Janie's hopes for love come alive again. However, the second marriage becomes the basis for Hurston's theme of speech versus silence. Joe became mayor and expected his wife to act a certain way. He did not want her to talk to the townsfolk, have a social life, or even express herself because he wanted her to act like a mayor's wife. When Joe became mayor, Janie was called up to make a

speech, but Joe “spoke out without giving her a chance to say anything” (41). From the start of the marriage, clearly, Janie was silenced. She loves listening to stories, but Joe will not even let her sit with the community to hear them. Her husband tries to control Janie, and that control will soon end their marriage and love. Love is not created through control. Joe believes that by silencing his wife, she will appear to be the appropriate mayor’s wife. However, he just drives Janie away by suppressing her individuality. She had no more “blossomy openings dusting pollen over her man, neither any glistening young fruit where petals used to be” (68). The same image that was used at the beginning of the text applies here. The image shows how one thing, or in this case, person, needs the other to thrive and be who they are. Joe does not let Janie’s individuality shine. However, she is always the good wife, keeping her feelings to herself and obeying her husband. However, one day, Janie makes a clumsy mistake while cutting a plug of tobacco for a customer and Joe called her on it, insulting her. Janie finally made herself heard and stopped herself from being silent, insulting her husband right back: 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 out 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. (75) Janie finally finds her voice, and stands up for herself. She shows her strength, breaking free of her stereotype. She is no longer controlled by someone that “loves” her and is no longer silenced. Janie’s third husband, Tea Cake, is unlike the others. He

actually treats her as an equal, caring about her wants and needs. Tea Cake engages her speech, conversing with her and putting himself on equal terms with her. Her love for him stems from his respect for her as an individual. The first time they meet, Tea Cake invites her to play checkers; someone actually “ thought it was natural for her to play” (92). She respected him for treating her with dignity. She felt as if “ she had known him all her life...She had been able to talk with him right off” (94). From the start, she felt comfortable around him. She recognizes that she has tried living her grandmother’s way, but now she is ready for something new. While Jody wanted her to act pretentious and high-class, Tea Cake treats her as she wants to be treated. Through experience, she has begun to understand love more clearly, and knows that Tea Cake is right for her. Between Joe Starks and Tea Cake, Janie enjoyed her six-month period of freedom. She embraced her independence. At the end of the novel, Janie is alone. However, she seems content, proud of all that she has gone through. She frees herself from her unpleasant and unfulfilling relationships with Logan and Jody, who hinder her personal journey. Through her relationship with Tea Cake, Janie experiences true fulfillment and becomes secure in her independence. Janie views fulfilling relationships as reciprocal and based on mutual respect, as demonstrated in her relationship with Tea Cake. In Zora Neale Hurston’s novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the reader sees one character’s journey towards figuring out love. Janie Crawford, the protagonist, deciphers through experience what love actually is. Through her text, Hurston discusses love versus independence and speech versus silence. Janie realizes that love is based on mutual respect and care for your partner. One

person in the relationship is not more important than the other. Janie's first two husbands would not let Janie express who she was. She had to hide her individuality. However, Tea Cake embraced his wife's person, loving her for who she was. Janie saw love and marriage as a bond between people who strengthen each other and bring out the best in each other. Each person would care for the other and look out for what they needed and wanted. Without the other, neither of the couple could survive.