

The significance of gender roles and the revolution of womenfolk in the novel

[History](#), [Revolution](#)



Both men and women play central but rather significantly varying roles in different cultures. However, generally, the woman is looked down upon, considered the second class and judged principally by how well she can relate to the man. Men, on the other hand, desire to establish and maintain a higher mantle by trampling on women, and killing their ambitions even before they come to life. This tendency is motivated purely by a quest for dominance. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is Zora Neale Hurston's novel that highlights gender roles as a theme and its importance in the African American setting in the early 20th century with Janie as the center of focus (Zora). In the sixth chapter, and indeed throughout most of the novel, Zora points out the grandness that the males attached to their perception of superiority to the extent that they relegated the womenfolk to submissiveness, and treating them, not as partners, but their possession. This kind of mindset causes the character, Janie Crawford, to conclude that her liberation as a woman can only be attained from independence from the shackles of Joe's grasp. The idea that women are to be submissive to men is illustrated by the extent of Joe's control over Janie. He narrates that Janie loved conversation, and sometimes, she thought up good stories on the mule, but Joe had forbidden her from such indulgence (Zora 53). This can be attributed to the fact that Janie felt like Joe's mule in her union with him, and had grown thirsty of liberation from her cruel master. Joe seems to be of the opinion that Janie is his possession, and was there for the sole purpose of pleasing him. He emphasizes this when he sees other men drooling over his wife. He says that " Her hair was NOT going to show in the store...She was there in the store for him to look at, not those others" (Zora 55). However, in

the face of all these adversities, Janie seems determined to shake off the hugely lopsided gender roles that were entirely in favor of men. She is eager to embark on a path of self-happiness. In the entire novel, it is evident that men do not shy from exhibiting their superiority, and are quick to mete “punishment” whenever their partner’s acts are deemed “unbecoming”. They are of a strong belief that women are nescient and need instruction on virtually all aspects of living. The symbolic liberation of women is finally brought out when Janie talks back to Joe for the first time. She tells him that God speaks to both men and women and that men see themselves as mighty while they have nothing to strain themselves against but women and chicken (Zora 75). She makes it known to Joe that it was not the intention of God that the inequalities between man and woman existed. This act of liberating herself from the traditional expectations of women is not only a strong statement of Janie’s character and her will to gain equality and independence, but also an overwhelming indictment on the attitude of Joe, and society in general towards women.