



## Finger on the Trigger of Destiny: A Study of Their Eyes Were Watching God

Sameeul Haq Nazki  
University of Kashmir

**Corresponding Author:** Sameeul Haq Nazki [saminazki@gmail.com](mailto:saminazki@gmail.com)

---

### ARTICLE INFO

*Keywords:* Individuality, Societal Norms, True Love, Destiny, Self-Discovery, Self-Respect

*Received :* 21, May

*Revised :* 22, June

*Accepted:* 30, July

©2024 Nazki: This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



### ABSTRACT

This study explores the metaphorical idea of “a finger on the trigger of destiny”, which finds expression in Zora Neale Hurston’s 1937 book *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. In the context of interpersonal interactions and cultural expectations, the story follows Janie Crawford on her path to self-discovery and empowerment. This research describes how Janie navigates and ultimately creates her destiny through an examination of her three marriages, her search for self-identity, and the symbolic motifs of the horizon and the pear tree. The Eatonville community’s impact on path is also examined in the study. Janie is a strong example of self-determination who embraces her goals and takes charge of her life, embodying the novel’s larger themes of autonomy, gender, and race. This examination highlights how Hurston’s depiction of the human fight for identity and agency remains timeless. This study aims to dissect how Janie navigates her destiny amidst the pressures and constraints imposed by society, her relationships, and her inner aspirations. In this study, aim is to delve into the profound themes embedded within Hurston’s work, with a particular focus on the role of fate and agency in shaping Janie’s journey. Through a meticulous analysis of character dynamics, narrative structure, and socio-cultural context, we aim to unravel the intricate tapestry of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and illuminate its enduring relevance in contemporary discourse.

---

## INTRODUCTION

As a classic work of American literature, it delves into the complex interplay between identity, autonomy, and the quest for personal fulfilment. With the backdrop of early 20th-century America, Hurston's narrative skilfully reveals the path of Janie Crawford, a woman of extraordinary tenacity and agency, as she negotiates the difficulties of love, societal expectations, and self-discovery. "A Finger on the Trigger of Destiny" best captures the core tension driving Janie's story. The main characteristic of Janie's journey is her disobedience to the paths society has set for her. Janie exhibits remarkable tenacity, her spirit unwavering in the face of misfortune, from her early ambitions to her turbulent relationships. Janie's decisions are like a finger poised on her destiny, ready to make her own way despite the limitations placed on her by circumstance and society. By means of her personal experiences, Hurston challenges readers' preconceived views of empowerment and determinism by asking them to consider the relationship between external factors and internal agency.

It is essential to place *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in the larger context of African American literature and feminist discourse before beginning this investigation. Hurston's ground-breaking book offers a complex portrait of resiliency and self-determination while also elevating the voices of black women and challenging popular victimisation myths. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is part of a vast legacy of African American literature and feminist thought, rather than existing in a vacuum. Hurston gives black women more prominence in her book by providing a counter narrative to popular preconceptions and elevating Janie to the status of a symbol of empowerment and agency. The readers are enlightened regarding the factors influencing Janie's life and her options by placing her within the larger sociocultural framework of her era.

Recognising Hurston's storytelling skill, the magnificent prose, the striking imagery, and the genuine conversation is the fundamental component of this analysis. By carefully analysing the relationships between characters and the structure of the story, an attempt has been made to reveal the deeper meanings that the work contains and shed light on the universal lessons it aims to teach. The painful facts about racism and gender that this book discloses force the reader to confront them. Even though Janie's path is quite personal, it reflects the hardships faced by marginalised populations in an unjust world as they work for self-determination. By addressing these subjects delicately and nuancedly, we pay tribute to Hurston's legacy and recognise the work's ongoing significance in the present-day world.

Finally, this research demonstrates the timeless significance of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, a significance that appeals to readers of all backgrounds and spans all eras. This analysis aims to illuminate the deep insights it provides into the human condition and stimulate additional research into its themes and motifs. Hurston's appeal to accept our own agency, to put our finger on the trigger of destiny, and to forge our own path through life's turbulent seas is meticulous. As we flip the pages of this masterwork, a glimpse into human

conditions is provided, and readiness to cope with the challenges of life is presented.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Related Works*

*Their Eyes Were Watching God*, a novel by Zora Neale Hurston, has inspired various scholarly works and literary analyses. Here are some related works and studies that explore different aspects of the novel:

#### 1. Scholarly Articles and Essays

1. *The Hierarchy Itself: Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God and the Sacrifice of Narrative Authority* by Deborah G. Plant. This essay explores the novel's narrative structure and the role of storytelling, examining how Hurston challenges traditional narrative authority.
2. *Love and Marriage in Their Eyes Were Watching God: A Study of Black Female Selfhood* by Maria J. Racine. This article delves into the themes of love, marriage, and identity, focusing on Janie's journey towards self-realization and empowerment.
3. *The Eatonville Anthology: The Intersections of Race, Gender, and Class in Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Cheryl A. Wall. This piece analyses how Hurston addresses the intersections of race, gender, and class in the context of Eatonville, highlighting the community's influence on Janie's development.

#### 2. Books

1. *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography* by Robert E. Hemenway. This biography provides an in-depth look at Hurston's life, including her experiences that influenced the writing of "Their Eyes Were Watching God."
2. *Speak So You Can Speak Again: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston* by Lucy Anne Hurston and the Estate of Zora Neale Hurston. A collaborative biography offering personal insights and anecdotes from Hurston's life, shedding light on her creative process and literary achievements.
3. *The Inside Light: New Critical Essays on Zora Neale Hurston* edited by Deborah G. Plant

A collection of critical essays that examine various aspects of Hurston's work, including themes, narrative techniques, and cultural context.

#### 3. Comparative Studies

1. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* by Patricia Hill Collins. Although not solely focused on Hurston, this book includes discussions on the contributions of black women writers like Hurston to feminist thought.

2. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* by Audre Lorde. This collection of essays by Audre Lorde offers valuable perspectives on black womanhood and identity that resonate with themes in Hurston's novel.
3. *The Colour Purple* by Alice Walker: Often studied alongside *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Alice Walker's novel explores similar themes of black female empowerment, resilience, and self-discovery.

#### 4. Literary Criticism

- a. *Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narrative* by Valerie Smith: This book includes an analysis of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* within the broader context of African American literature, focusing on themes of self-discovery and narrative authority.
- b. *Mules and Men* by Zora Neale Hurston: While this is a work by Hurston herself, it provides context to her anthropological work and folk studies, which influenced her portrayal of African American culture in her novel.

These works offer a comprehensive understanding of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and its significance in literature, exploring various themes, narrative techniques, and cultural contexts. They also highlight Hurston's contribution to African American literature and feminist thought.

## METHODOLOGY

Researching *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston involves a multi-faceted approach to understand the novel's themes, narrative techniques, historical context, and literary significance. Here is a comprehensive research methodology to guide a study titled "Finger on the Trigger of Destiny: A Study of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*":

### Literary Analysis

#### *Close Reading*

1. **Textual Analysis:** Perform a close reading of the novel to identify key themes, motifs, and symbols. Focus on recurring imagery and metaphorical language.
2. **Character Analysis:** Examine the development of main characters, particularly Janie Crawford, and their relationships. Analyse how their experiences and interactions drive the narrative.
3. **Narrative Structure:** Analyse the novel's structure, including the use of frame narrative and shifts in narrative perspective.

### Thematic Exploration

#### *Major Themes*

1. **Identity and Self-Discovery:** Investigate how Janie's journey reflects themes of personal growth and self-realization.
2. **Love and Relationships:** Explore the various forms of love depicted in the novel and how they influence Janie's evolution.
3. **Race and Gender:** Analyse the intersection of race and gender, and how these elements shape the characters' experiences and societal roles.

Voice and Silence: Study the importance of voice and storytelling, and the instances of silence and its implications.

## **Historical and Cultural Context**

### *Historical Background*

1. Harlem Renaissance: Place the novel within the context of the Harlem Renaissance, examining how Hurston's work was influenced by and contributed to this cultural movement.
2. African American Folklore: Research Hurston's background in anthropology and folklore, and how it informs the novel's content and style.

Social and Political Context: Consider the social and political climate of the early 20th century, particularly regarding race relations and the status of African American women.

## **Comparative Analysis**

### *Literary Comparisons*

1. Contemporary Works: Compare *Their Eyes Were Watching God* to other works by Hurston and her contemporaries, such as Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and Nella Larsen.
2. Influence and Legacy: Investigate the novel's influence on later African American literature, particularly works by Alice Walker and Toni Morrison.

## **Critical Reception**

### *Scholarly Criticism*

1. Initial Reception: Review contemporary reviews and criticisms from the time of the novel's publication.
2. Modern Criticism: Analyse modern scholarly articles and critical essays to understand the evolving interpretation of the novel.
3. Feminist and Black Feminist Critique: Explore feminist and black feminist readings of the novel, focusing on themes of female empowerment and resistance.

## **Methodological Tools**

### *Primary Sources*

1. Text of the Novel: Use the original text of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as the primary source for analysis.
2. Hurston's Other Works: Include her other literary and anthropological works to provide additional context.

### *Secondary Sources*

1. Biographies: Utilize biographies of Zora Neale Hurston to gain insight into her life and influences.

2. Critical Essays: Engage with critical essays and academic papers to support and challenge your interpretations.
3. Historical Documents: Examine historical documents from the period to understand the broader societal context.

## **Synthesis and Conclusion**

### *Integration of Findings*

1. Thematic Synthesis: Integrate findings from literary analysis, thematic exploration, historical context, and critical reception to present a cohesive argument.
2. Critical Perspective: Offer a unique critical perspective on the novel, supported by evidence from primary and secondary sources.

## **Presentation of Research**

### *Academic Writing*

1. Structured Argument: Present your research in a well-structured format, with clear sections for introduction, literature review, methodology, analysis, discussion, and conclusion.
2. Citation and References: Ensure proper citation of all sources used, following an appropriate academic style guide (e.g., MLA, APA, and Chicago).

By following this research methodology, you can develop a thorough and nuanced understanding of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, its literary significance, and its place within the broader context of American literature and culture.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

American fiction frequently and persistently explores the issue of the individual versus society, which reflects the political, social, and cultural contexts of the nation. This theme examines the conflict between individual autonomy and social standards, frequently emphasizing the hardships of those who defy or are subjected to social injustices. Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* depicts Hock's internal struggle between doing what is right and fitting in with society's expectations. F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* the pursuit of success and love by a person is embodied in Jay Gatsby, who frequently clashes with the moral deterioration and shallow values of the society around him. Harper Lee examines the struggle between personal morality and racial prejudice in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The narrative of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* follows the protagonist as he battles the social forces that make him invisible. These books continue to compel readers to consider how they relate to the society they live in through a variety of stories and characters. Thus, American literature in general and fiction in particular continue to be dominated by this issue.

This theme is a major characteristic of Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and embodies a significant element of "Finger on the trigger of destiny". It involves two major elements: the challenges of redefining and

questioning the 'value system of traditional African society' and its expectations of women, and 'exposing and delimiting the unjust and oppressive male dominance' in society. The former theme involves the Janie's resurrection through the defence and assault of outdated and oppressive society. With this aim, Janie with the fingers on the trigger voyages to find true love in accordance with the female values. Hurston has given a great attention to the former issue from the beginning of the novel. The novel opens with a powerful scene that sets the tone for the entire narrative. This opening scene is crucial as it introduces readers to Janie and sets the stage for the retrospective storytelling.

Janie Crawford, protagonist of the novel, returns to Eatonville, a small all-Black town in Florida, after a long absence. Her reappearance stirs a mix of curiosity, judgment, and gossip among the townspeople. Hurston outrightly shows disdain towards these gossips: "These sitters had been tongueless, earless, eyeless conveniences all day long. Mules and other brutes had occupied their skins" (32). Hurston draws a parallel between the people and labouring animals to convey a severe antagonism towards the gossipers. The townspeople, who sit on their porches and observe Janie's arrival, are quick to speculate about her life and the reasons for her return. They note her physical appearance, particularly the overalls she wears, which starkly contrast with the traditional feminine attire they expected her to don. Her confident stride and the fact that she is alone – without a husband – fuel their gossip. "Seeing the woman as she was made them remember the envy they had stored up from other times. So, they chewed up the back parts of their minds and swallowed with relish. They made burning statements with questions, and killing tools out of laughs". (32) The responses of the community toward Janie Crawford show their underlying feelings of envy and resentment. They wonder about the fate of her last (3rd) husband, Tea Cake, and speculate on the events that led her back to Eatonville.

The community's reaction is characterized by a mix of envy, curiosity, and judgment. The men are drawn to Janie's physical beauty and strength: "The men noticed her firm buttocks like she had grapefruits in her hip pockets; the great rope of black hair swinging to her waist and unravelling in the wind like a plume; ... (33). Hurston captures this dynamic episode vividly through the dialogue and inner thoughts of the townspeople:

"What she doing coming back here in deem overalls? Can't she find no dress to put on? Where's date blue satin dress she left here in? Where all date money her husband took and died and left her? What date ole forty years ole 'Oman doing' wide her hair swinging' down her back Lak some young gal? Where she left date young lad of a boy, she went off here wide? Thought she was going to marry? Where he left her? What he done wide all her money? Betcha he off wide some gal so young she isn't even got no hairs why she doesn't stay in her class?" (33)

The complaint of the community that Janie "could stop and say a few words with us" indicates a sense of entitlement to Janie's time and attention, as well as a demand for her conformity to social norms. "She acts like we done

something to her" (34) suggests a lack of self-awareness or acknowledgment of their own role in marginalising Janie. It shifts the blame onto Janie, painting her as unreasonably distant or arrogant. This reflects Janie's actions and choices, especially those that defy traditional gender roles or expectations and are harshly criticised by her peers. Lulu and Pearl's remarks to Pheoby demonstrate the casual, often intrusive nature of community interactions in Eatonville. Their willingness to "mind yo' house" (35) suggests a close-knit, albeit nosy, community where everyone feels entitled to know each other's business. Lulu's comment, "just go right ahead, us can mind yo' house for you till you got back, (35) shows a superficial layer of support, though it is tinged with the expectation of gossip. Her words imply a readiness to keep tabs on Janie's affairs under the guise of neighbourly concern. The community's desire for the answers to be "cruel and strange" reflects their tendency to revel in sensationalism and schadenfreude. Janie's response to the community's chatter is one of composed silence. Her quiet demeanour and calm presence in the face of their judgmental gaze highlight her strength and self-assurance. Against this community gossip, "she kept walking straight on to her gate. The porch couldn't talk for looking" (33). This silent defiance against their scrutiny and gossip demonstrates Janie's inner transformation and resilience. She "discovers a self in opposition to the cultural prescriptions, and proceeds on a quest of self-fulfilment" (Fulton, 2006: 83). She no longer seeks validation from the community; instead, she is confident in her own story and worth. Janie's struggles with the community's scrutiny represent her broader conflict with societal expectations. The interactions among the women underscore how community pressure can impact personal freedom and choices. Hurston shows the tension between individual autonomy and communal surveillance, enriching the narrative with a realistic portrayal of Southern African American life in the early 20th century.

Phoebe, Janie's friend, acts in contrast to the attitude of community. She intends to check on Janie and bring her supper signifies a deeper, more genuine form of friendship and care. Janie expresses her appreciation for Phoebe's kind words, recognizing that they are sincere. She says, "Ah takes date flattery Offa you, Phoebe, cause Ah know it's from de heart" (36). This means she accepts the compliment because she knows it's genuine. Janie extends her hand to Phoebe, signalling that she is ready to receive whatever food Phoebe has brought: "Good Lewd, Phoebe! Aren't you never going' thus gimme date ill rations you brought me? Ah isn't had a thing on mash stomach today excepting' mash hand" (36). Phoebe acknowledges that she knew Janie would be hungry, "Ah knower you'd be hungry. No time to be hunting' stove wood after dark" (36). The covered bowl of mulatto rice symbolizes Phoebe's nurturing nature and the cultural significance of food in their community, acting as a bridge of care and comfort. The "heaping plate of mulatto rice" (35) is not just food but a gesture of solidarity and support, reinforcing the importance of their bond in a community that often seeks to isolate and judge. Phoebe's actions contrast with the other women's more voyeuristic interest in Janie's well-being. Hurston



emphasises friendship made popular in African literature by Alice Walker's concept of "Womanism".

When Phoebe sees Janie, she is sitting on the steps of the back porch, engaging in everyday task of cleaning "the lamps all filled and the chimneys cleaned" (35). This mundane activity underscores her resilience and her attempt to maintain normalcy and self-care amidst the turbulence of her life. Her response to Phoebe, "Aw, pretty good, Ah'm trying' to soak some uh de tiredness and de dirt outa mash feet," (35) along with her laughter, illustrates her strength and ability to find moments of levity despite her struggles. Janie's close friend Phoebe Watson is the one person who does not indulge in idle gossip. Instead, she welcomes Janie and expresses genuine concern and curiosity about her journey. "Phoebe Watson hitched her rocking chair forward before she spoke" (34). Phoebe's sarcastic remark, "You'd think de folks in dis town didn't do nothing' in de bed 'kept praise de Lewd, (35) critiques the hypocrisy of the townspeople. It suggests that while they are quick to judge Janie, they themselves are not without fault. The towns people eagerness to judge Janie while ignoring their own flaws highlights the hypocrisy prevalent in the community. Phoebe's pointed critique exposes the double standards and moral inconsistencies of the townspeople, emphasizing the novel's exploration of social judgment and the often-unjust nature of communal scrutiny. Hurston uses this hypocrisy to critique the superficial morality often upheld by society.

Phoebe dismisses the concerns others have about Janie and tries to appear unaffected by the gossip: "nobody doesn't know if it's anything to tell or not. Me, Ah'm her best friend, and Ah don't know" (34). The dialogue between the characters reflects on gossip, judgment, and the impact of envy and malice in social interactions. They believe community tend to gossip and pass judgment on others, often based on envy and assumptions. This is skilfully captured by Hurston; "An envious heart makes a treacherous ear"" (37). Through their conversation, we gain a deeper understanding of the pressures and challenges faced by the characters in their community. "Yes indeed. You know if you pass some people and don't speak thus suit 'am day got thus go way back in yo' life and see what you ever done. They know mo.' 'bout yuh than you do yo' self"" (37). They conclude with the realisation that people often believe they understand someone's life better than the person living it.

Phoebe's presence provides Janie with a safe space to recount her story, which she does through a narrative framed as a conversation between the two women. Through Phoebe, Hurston provides Janie with a listener who values her experiences and her voice. This sets the stage for the novel's structure, where Janie's story unfolds as a series of flashbacks narrated to Phoebe. Janie's return in overalls, a symbol of her labour and experiences, juxtaposed against the townspeople's expectations, underscores the theme of individuality versus societal norms. Janie's return to Eatonville and the community's reaction to her presence introduce readers to the central conflict between individual desires and societal expectations. Her silence in the face of gossip represents her rejection of their superficial judgments and her embrace of her own truth. The porch sitters, representing the collective voice of the community, serve as a

Greek chorus, commenting on the action and setting the social context in which Janie's story will be told. Their gossip and speculation provide a backdrop against which Janie's narrative of empowerment and self-discovery will unfold. Through this scene, Hurston establishes Janie as a strong, independent woman who, despite the community's scrutiny, remains unwavering in her sense of self.

When Phoebe signalled that she respects Janie's privacy and isn't eager to indulge the towns curiosity without understanding the full story herself, Janie felt assured and began to narrate her saga of life. She begins with a brief encounter between Janie Crawford and Johnny Taylor plays a pivotal role in the development of Janie's character and the trajectory of her life. The encounter between Janie Crawford and Johnny Taylor is a pivotal moment that sets the stage for Janie's journey of self-discovery and quest for true love. This encounter is often referred to metaphorically as the "Finger on the Trigger of Destiny," signifying a moment of profound change and the start of Janie's pursuit of her own desires and identity. With "Finger on the Trigger of Destiny," Janie takes her first towards her future. This moment, though fleeting, marks the beginning of Janie's exploration of her own desires and the stark contrast between her youthful dreams and the harsh realities imposed by those around her. Janie's relationship with Johnny Taylor begins with a moment of personal awakening under a blooming pear tree in her grandmother's backyard. This scene is rich with symbolism and sets the stage for Janie's quest for love and fulfilment. As Janie observes the natural harmony and beauty of the pear tree, she envisions an idealized form of love and marriage:

She was stretched on her back beneath the pear tree soaking in the alto chant of the visiting bees, the gold of the sun and the panting breath of the breeze when the inaudible voice of it all came to her. 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!"

(43)

This idyllic vision of love profoundly impacts Janie, stirring her longing for a relationship that mirrors the beauty and reciprocity she sees in nature.

Janie's interaction with Johnny Taylor is the immediate, tangible result of her newfound romantic and sexual awareness. Seeing Johnny Taylor approach, Janie is compelled to act on her feelings, leading to their kiss over the gatepost. This kiss is Janie's first act of defiance against her controlled and sheltered upbringing, a moment where she expresses her own desires: "Through pollinated air she saw a glorious being coming up the road. In her former blindness she had known him as shiftless Johnny Taylor, tall and lean. That was before the golden dust of pollen had beglamored his rags and her eyes" (43). However, this innocent and spontaneous act is abruptly interrupted by Nanny, who witnesses the kiss and reacts with alarm. For Nanny, who has suffered greatly in her own life and witnessed the hardships of her daughter, Janie's

mother, this kiss represents a dangerous step toward potential ruin. Her immediate concern is to protect Janie from the vulnerabilities of womanhood as she perceives them.

Nanny's response to Janie's kiss with Johnny Taylor is swift and decisive. "Nanny's head and face looked like the standing roots of some old tree that had been torn away by storm. Foundation of ancient power that no longer mattered. The cooling Palma Christi leaves that Janie had bound about her grandma's head with a white rag had wilted down and become part and parcel of the woman. Her eyes didn't bore and pierce. They diffused and melted Janie, the room and the world into one comprehension" (44). She perceives it as a threat to Janie's future and a potential repeat of the sufferings she and Janie's mother endured. "Ah don't want no trashy nigger, no breath-and-britches, lak Johnny Taylor using' yo' body to wipe his fooks on" (13). She believes that young men, driven by passion rather than commitment, will exploit Janie's beauty and then abandon her. In Nanny's view, men will take advantage of women's bodies. Nanny believes a teenage romance will inevitably result in Janie being used for her body, a belief shaped by several key factors: Nanny was born into slavery and experienced sexual exploitation firsthand and witnessed the vulnerability of Black women to being used and discarded by men, both during and after slavery. Donald Marks argues that "Throughout the novel Hurston links sexuality with the threat of violence" (Marks, 1985: 156). Nanny's own daughter, Janie's mother, was raped by a schoolteacher, which further reinforces her fears about the danger's young women face. This hints at the challenges and struggle in her future life. "Janie's existence will become a continuous struggle to bring her own experience into harmony with her initial vision of the pear tree" (Casas, 2013: 72).

Nanny's experiences as a former slave and her desire to secure Janie's future prompt her to arrange a marriage with Logan Killicks, a man much older but deemed capable of providing stability and security: "Yeah, Janie, youse got yo' womanhood on yuh. So, Ah mout ez well tell yuh what Ah been savin' up for uh spell. Ah wants to see you married right away" (44). Nanny's decision underscores the generational divide between her protective pragmatism and Janie's youthful idealism. For Nanny, the kiss is a sign that Janie is vulnerable to the same dangers that plagued her own life and that of her daughter. This early relationship, brief as it is, has a profound impact on Janie's life. The kiss with Johnny Taylor leads directly to her marriage to Logan Killicks, a union that lacks love and emotional fulfillment. This marriage marks the beginning of Janie's journey through relationships, each of which teaches her more about her own desires and the nature of love.

The incident with Johnny Taylor also sets up the central conflict of the novel: Janie's struggle to find a balance between societal expectations and her own aspirations for love and happiness. Her forced marriage to Logan Killicks becomes a crucial point of departure, pushing her to question and eventually rebel against the constraints placed on her by others. Through this early experience, Hurston highlights the tension between individual desires and

societal expectations, a theme that resonates throughout Janie's journey in the novel.

An example of this conflict between individual wishes and society standards is Janie's forced marriage to Logan Killicks. It emphasises the themes of security versus love, the limitations imposed on women, and the start of Janie's path to self-awareness. This marriage is a pivotal moment in the story that moves Janie closer to her ultimate objective of leading a happy and genuine life. A significant turning point in Janie's life that foreshadows her quest for genuine love and self-discovery is her marriage to Logan Killicks. Janie's grandmother, Nanny, played a major role in arranging her marriage to Logan Killicks. Nanny puts Janie's financial security and social stability ahead of romantic love because she understands the struggles and vulnerabilities that come with being a black woman in a patriarchal society. Baker comments, "Nanny's history under slavery dictates her strategic manoeuvres in the wars of property and propriety. 'Having been denied a say in her own fate because she was property, she assumes that only property enables expression (1984: 9). In the early 20th century, Black women were at the bottom of the social hierarchy. They had limited rights and opportunities, making them particularly vulnerable to exploitation. According to Haddox, "Nanny suggests that the world's fundamental oppression is binary and economic in nature, a matter of one class compelling and controlling the labour of another" (2001: 20). Nanny believes that economic stability is crucial for Janie's protection. Without financial security, Janie could be easily exploited by men who see her as nothing more than a physical object. Janie is told by Nanny:

"Tain'd Logan Killicks Ah wants you to have, baby, it's protection. Ah isn't Gittin' ole, honey. Ah m done ole. One morning' soon, now, de angel wide de sword is gonium stop by here. De day and de hour are hidden from me, but it won't be long. Ah as de Lewd when you were uh infant in mash arms to let me stay here till you got grown. He done spared me to see de day. Mah daily prayer now is thus let dese golden moments rolls on a few days longer till Ah see you safe in life" (47)

With his 60 acres of land and somewhat secure job, Nanny thinks Logan will provide Janie the safety and security she needs. Nanny's choice is impacted by her own horrific past as a former slave and a mother who saw her daughter go through hardship. Nanny convinces Janie to be married by highlighting the protection and other practical advantages it would provide. She contrasts Logan's financial security and his 60 acres of property with the hardships she and Janie's mother endured. She thinks Janie will have a secure existence because of Logan Killicks' position and acreage. She thinks that the greatest way to make sure Janie doesn't have the same difficulties is through a practical marriage.

At first, Janie is against the thought of being married to Logan. Her conception of love, represented by the blossoming pear tree she admired as a child, has formed her romantic beliefs. Janie's personal desires and dreams are

suppressed in her marriage to Logan. She realizes that the romantic notions she had about marriage are not aligned with the reality she faces: "She knew now that marriage did not make love. Janie's first dream was dead, so she became a woman" (57). This concept stands in sharp contrast to Nanny's idealised, cold-blooded marriage to Logan. Janie's internal struggle is apparent as she struggles to balance her need to satisfy her grandmother's demands with her own desires. She believes that marriage will lead to love, but when she finds out that Logan Killicks is not the spouse she had in mind, she becomes discouraged. Logan Killicks and Janie Killicks' marriage serves as a symbol of the expectations society has for women, especially black women. Marriage is not portrayed as a romantic connection, but as a social compact. This is a reflection of the limited positions and choices that women have in society, where marriage frequently serves as a vehicle for social respectability and financial security rather than personal happiness.

The portrayal of Logan Killicks as a dedicated farmer with a grounded outlook on marriage and life stands in stark contrast to Janie's utopian beliefs. Janie soon finds that her marriage is oppressive since Logan starts to treat her more like a helper than a spouse. "Their Eyes Were Watching God, deals far more extensively with sexism, the struggle of a woman to be regarded as a person in a male-dominated society" (Walker, 1974-75: 520). This made her hope for affection and love in the relationship less strong. The turning point in Janie's path is her marriage to Logan Killicks. She decides to leave Logan in search of a life that is more in line with her goals. The union of Janie and Logan Killicks serves as a critique of gender norms and the limitations imposed on women's independence. Janie is less of a companion and more of a worker in Logan Killicks' eyes. "Logan Killick's 'often-mentioned' sixty acres, ... her housemate seeks to confine Janie's consciousness inversely, seemingly, by just as much" (Gates, 2000: 77). This dynamic is illustrated in the text: "He had stopped talking to her in rhymes and was threatening in sentences. Janie knew now that marriage did not make love. Janie's first dream was dead, so she became a woman" (57). Logan's shift from courtship to demands for labour signifies the transactional nature of their marriage. He anticipates that she will assist him in heavy lifting and farm maintenance. Instead of acknowledging Janie as a unique person with wants and goals of her own, this relationship turns her into an economic asset. Thus, the marriage turns into an exchange of goods and services where Janie's worth is based on her work, highlighting the limited roles that women can play and their lack of financial freedom. Janie's marriage to Logan stifles her own aspirations and passions. There is no room for her individuality as she is expected to fit the mould of a devoted wife. One could argue that Janie's decision to leave Logan and her discontent with him were acts of rebellion against the restrictive conventions of her era. Janie's path to self-awareness and empowerment has begun with this choice. Janie wants to forge her own path and rejects the idea that a woman's value is dependent on her adherence to traditional marital duties, which is why she left Logan. Her rebellion against the oppressive norms of her marriage is captured when she confronts Logan: "If you can stand not to chop and tote wood Ah reckon you

can stand not to git no dinner... Ah'm just as stiff as you are stout. If you don't want me, you show don't have to keep me" (58). With this choice, Janie embarks on her journey towards self-discovery and genuine love, which paves the way for her later relationships with Tea Cake.

Janie's relationship with Vergil "Tea Cake" is pivotal in her journey towards self-discovery. This relationship is markedly different from her previous marriages and offers insights into themes of love, equality, and self-fulfilment. Tea Cake treats Janie as an equal, which is a stark contrast to her previous husbands. He encourages her to participate in activities and respects her opinions. This sense of equality is highlighted in the novel: "He drifted off to sleep and Janie looked down on him and felt a self-crushing love. So, her soul crawled out from its hiding place." Tea Cake supports Janie's independence and encourages her to be herself. Unlike her previous husbands, he does not impose restrictive expectations on her. "Unlike her relationships with Logan and Joe, Janie's relationship with Tea Cake is based not upon power or domination but upon play" (McGowan, 1999: 110). This is evident when he teaches her how to play checkers, an activity she was never allowed to enjoy before: "Somebody wanted her to play. Somebody thought it natural for her to play. That was even nice" (137). Tea Cake values Janie's thoughts and feelings, and they work together as a team. This dynamic is showcased when they move to the Everglades and work side by side in the fields: "Sometimes Janie would think of the old days in the big white house and the store and laugh to herself. What if Eatonville could see her now in her blue denim overalls and heavy shoes? Nobody could tell her anything about handling a hoe anymore" (177). While their relationship is mostly positive, it is not without challenges. She "flourishes in love and experiences the respect of an equal that she so desired in her earlier marriages" (Racine, 1994: 288). Tea Cake's occasional jealousy and their struggles in the Everglades test their bond. However, these challenges contribute to Janie's personal growth and understanding of love: "He drifted off to sleep and Janie looked down on him and felt a self-crushing love. So, her soul crawled out from its hiding place" (171). Through their time together, she experiences genuine love and companionship, which allows her to discover her true self: "Here was peace. She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much of life in it meshes! She called in her soul to come and see" (243). This underscores Janie's sense of completeness and fulfilment, achieved through her journey with Tea Cake.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The phrase "finger on the trigger of destiny" sums up the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God's* examination of individuality, self-discovery, and pursuing one's own passions. Hurston explores the difficulties involved in defying social expectations and the challenges of pursuing personal fulfilment through the protagonist, Janie Crawford. The allegory of Janie having her "finger on the trigger of destiny" stands for her empowerment and readiness to take charge of her own fate. Her journey comes to an end when she returns to Eatonville, having learned about herself, experienced love, and lost something.

"Janie twice leaves established social positions for a more adventurous life, descends into the underworld of the hurricane, faces a literal trial following Tea Cake's death, and returns to Eatonville with her hard-won knowledge" (Kubitschek. 1983: 109). The resilience and strength required to follow and embrace one's own destiny in the face of social restraints are demonstrated by Janie's experience. Hurston's work eventually affirms the idea that, in order to truly find happiness and self-realisation, people must have the courage to reject social norms and pursue their own paths. The powerful empowerment narrative of Janie's story emphasises the importance of personal agency and the unrelenting pursuit of one's sincere objectives. Hurston provides a timeless analysis of the human condition and the never-ending search for fulfilment and self-discovery through Janie's experiences.

### FURTHER RESEARCH

This research still has limitations so further research needs to be done on this topic "Finger on the Trigger of Destiny: A Study of Their Eyes Were Watching God".

### REFERENCES

- Hurston, Zora Neale. (1937) *Their Eyes Were Watching God* with a Foreword by Edwidge Danticat. Harper Collins E-Books
- Casas Maroto, Ines. (2013). "'So, this was a marriage!' Intersections of Natural Imagery and the Semiotics of Space in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *Journal of English Studies* 11: 69-82. *Communications and Mass Media Complete*. Web. 26 Sept. 2024.
- Fulton, Do Veanna S. (2006). *Speaking Power: Black Feminist Orality in Women's Narratives of Slavery*. Albany: State U of New York. Print.
- Gates Jr., Henry Louis. (2000). "Zora Neale Hurston and the Speaker's Text." *Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God: A Casebook*. Ed. Cheryl A. Wall. Oxford: Oxford UP, 59-116. Print.
- Haddox, Thomas F. The Logic of Expenditure in "Their Eyes Were Watching God". *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, March 2001, Vol. 34, No. 1 (March 2001), pp. 19-34 Published by: University of Manitoba  
Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44029907>
- Houston A. Baker, *Blues, Ideology and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984), p. 57
- Kubitschek, Missy Dehn. Kubitschek "Tuh De Horizon and Back": The Female Quest in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* Reviewed work(s): Source: *Black American Literature Forum*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (Autumn, 1983), pp. 109-115 Published by: St.

Marks, Donald. (1985) "Sex, Violence, and Organic Consciousness in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *Black American Literature Forum*, 19.4: 152-157. JSTOR. Web. 25 Feb 2024.

McGowan, Todd. *Liberation and Domination: Their Eyes Were Watching God and the Evolution of Capitalism*. MELUS, Vol. 24, No. 1, *African American Literature* (Spring, 1999), pp. 109-128 Published by: Oxford University Press on behalf of The Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States (MELUS)

Racine, Maria J. (1994) "Voice and Interiority in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *African American Review*, 28.2: 283-292. JSTOR. Web. 25 Feb 2024.

Walker, S Jay. *Walker Zora Neale Hurston's "Their Eyes Were Watching God": Black Novel of Sexism* Source: *Modern Fiction Studies*, Winter 1974-75, Vol. 20, No. 4 (Winter 1974-75), pp. 519-527. Published by: The Johns Hopkins University Press Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26279990>