

## “Dialogic Text”: Metaphors in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

“Diyalektik Metin”: *Their Eyes Were Watching God* ve Değişmeceli Dil

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### Öz

Zenci sözlü anlatım geleneği hikaye anlatıcısıyla dinleyici arasındaki aktif etkileşim olarak tanımlanır. Bu etkileşimin amacı Afrikan-Amerikan hikâyelerini korumak ve gelecek kuşaklara aktarmaktır. Harlem Rönesans'ının ve modern Amerikan edebiyatının en önemli yazarlarından biri olan Zora Neale Hurston, değişmeceli dil kullanımıyla hikâye anlatıcısıyla dinleyici arasındaki bu etkileşimi etkin olarak kullanmaktadır. Hurston roman karakterlerinin kendini gerçekleştireme ve baskıcı ideolojileri direnme mücadelesinde güçlendirmek için etnik kültürü, yerel dili ve edebi teknikleri harmanlayarak etkili bir şekilde kullanmıştır. Bunu gerçekleştirmek ve Henry Lois Gates Jr. 'in “Konuşan metin” adını verdiği *Their Eyes Were Watching God* adlı eserinde karşılıklı etkileşim oluşturmak için halk dilini, mizahi ve değişmeceli anlatımı kullanmaktadır. Kültürü oluşturan diğer sistemler gibi, dil de bir “sosyal kurum” dur ve Hurston A. Baker' in dediği gibi “tanınma modelleri” dil tarafından “kurgulanmakta, telaffuz edilmekte ve aktarılmaktadır.” Bunun bilincinde olan Hurston incelenen eserinde kölelik ekonomisi anlayışını sorgulayacak ve aynı zamanda baskı altında ezilen zenci kadını özgürleştirerek dil kullanımlarını “oluşturmayı, şekillendirmeyi ve aktarmayı” hedeflemiştir. Bu bağlamda, bu makale *Their Eyes Were Watching God* adlı romanda değişmeceli dil kullanımının fonksiyonlarını tartışmakta ve eserin baskıcı ideolojiler ve söylemler tarafından oluşturulan kölelik ekonomisini eleştirmek ve geçersiz kılmak için nasıl bir bilinç oluşturduğunu tartışmayı hedeflemektedir.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Kölelik, Özgürlük, Mecaz, Hitabet, Kendini Gerçekleştirme

### Abstract

Black oral tradition is defined as an active interaction between listeners and storytellers. The purpose of this interaction is to preserve and transmit African-American narratives. As a significant literary figure in Harlem Renaissance and modern African-American literature, Zora Neale Hurston through her metaphorical language uses the interaction between the storyteller and listeners effectively. She intertwines folk culture, vernacular language, and literary techniques to empower her characters in their struggle of self-actualization or resistance against oppressive ideology. To do so, she uses folk dialect, humor, and metaphors offering a “speakerly text”, to borrow Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s phrase. Like other systems of culture, language is a ‘social institution’ and, as Houston A. Baker notes, the “models of cognition are conceived in, articulated through, and transmitted” by language. Zora Neale Hurston, whose use of language and artistic consciousness depends on social institutions that shape the language, was fully aware of language as a social institution and aims to “create, shape, maintain, and transmit” vernacular remedies that would complicate “economies of slavery” and liberate subjugated black women. In this vein, this paper attempts to discuss the function of metaphorical language in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as a rhetorical composition and analyze how it creates consciousness while problematizing and disavowing economies of slavery constructed by dominant ideologies and discourses.

**Keywords:** Slavery, Liberation, Metaphors, Rhetoric, Self-actualization

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*Women must turn to one another for stories; they must share the stories of their lives and their hopes and their unacceptable fantasies.*

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Like other systems of culture, language is a ‘social institution’ and, as Houston A. Baker notes, the “models of cognition are conceived in, articulated through, and transmitted” by language (Baker, 1984, p.100, emphasis in original). Zora Neale Hurston, whose use of language and artistic consciousness are depended on social institutions that shape the language, was fully aware of the function of a language as a social institution and aims to “create, shape, maintain, and transmit” vernacular remedies that would complicate “economies of slavery” and liberate subjugated black women. Thus, Janie Crawford, a sixteen year old mulatto protagonist, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (*Their Eyes*, hereafter) can liberate herself and the black female body through Hurston’s anthropological approach to vernacular, or Afro-American folk language. Lying beneath a pear tree, Janie experiences a sexual and spiritual awakening. Janie has never met her father and her mother has left when she was a small baby. She was brought up by her ex-slave grandmother, who forces her to marry an old fellow, Logan Killicks, with sixty-acre farm and a mule. In her search for love and self, Janie leaves Logan for Joe Starks and him for Vergible Woods (a.k.a Tea Cake). After Tea Cake’s death she returns to Eatonville, which is the first all black town established by freed slaves to tell her story to her friend. *Their Eyes* possesses the virtue of introducing essential, traditional, and subtextual dimensions of Afro-American discourse into the universe surrounding the novel. In this vein, this paper discusses the function of metaphorical language in *Their Eyes* as a rhetorical composition and how it creates consciousness while problematizing and disavowing economies of slavery constructed by dominant ideology and discourse.

*Their Eyes*, as Loyalie King notes, has been the subject of numerous books, essays, theses, and dissertations. She further states that the book “is now considered as a classic text in American and African American literature” (King, 2008, p. 114). The novel opens up with the end. Then, with flashbacks and stories, the text tells the reader Janie’s quest for self-fulfillment. After Tea Cake’s funeral, Janie returns home to Eatonville, where she meets up with her old friend, Pheoby Watson, and tells her the whole story in the manner of storyteller and listener. This narration to Pheoby provides the framing for the whole novel. Janie is a girl of mixed black and white heritage and lives with her once a slave maternal grandmother. As an adolescent, one day, Janie sees a bee pollinating a flower in her backyard pear tree. The moment can be read as awakening and becoming obsessed with finding true love. However, it will be a superficial reading to consider this moment only as a sexual awakening. This awakening is a multilayered phenomenon which aims to deconstruct oppression that maintains itself through maternal and historical discourses. Janie’s Nanny, embodying historical oppressive ideology, aims to prevent her from being abused or used by men. However, while doing so, she paradoxically oppresses Janie and marries her to an older pragmatic fellow, named Logan Killicks, who is obsessed with his sixty-acre field and a mule. This marriage cannot fulfill Janie’s desires but becomes a significant milestone in her journey. She leaves Logan for Joe Starks, who becomes the major of the all-black town Eatonville due to his oratorical ability. With Joe, Janie finds status and wealth, yet not subjectivity and self-actualization. Following Joe’s death, she meets her third husband, Tea Cake, who becomes the last vehicle in her journey to her self-actualization.

The text with its metaphorical language is significant in many ways. Hurston creates metaphorical constructions through “mule” “horizon” “ships” and “people.” Metaphor is defined as “a process of mapping between two different conceptual domains”: source domain and target domain (Simpson, 2004, p.41). Source domain refers to the concept we draw upon in order to create the metaphorical construction, whereas target domain refers to the topic or concept we want to describe through metaphor. Through these domains and metaphorical construction, the reader “conceptualizes their experience and their external world” (2004, p. 42). Hurston’s use of vernacular black language in *Their Eyes* reflects the world view of the community, which ensures maximum cognition in all spheres of social life in the fictitious all-black town of Eatonville, FL. This political move creates a “verbal and ideological unification and centralization” because African-American literature is inseparable from the historical, political, and cultural conditions that influenced and shaped it (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 667). In *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory*, Houston A. Baker offers a vernacular theory that aims to create a paradigm shift to analyze the Afro-American novel. He argues that “symbolic, and quite specifically symbolically anthropological [approach], offered avenues to the comprehension of Afro-American expressive culture in its plenitude” (Baker, 1984, p. 1). Baker attempts to provide suggestive accounts of moments in Afro-American discourse when “personae, protagonists, autobiographical narrators, or literary critics successfully negotiate an obdurate ‘economics of slavery’ and achieve a resonant, improvisational, [and] expressive dignity (1984, p. 13). He further states that vernacular indicates “arts [that are] native or peculiar to a particular country or locale” (1984, p. 11). Considered from this point of view, it can aptly be said that Hurston, in *Their Eyes*, ingeniously depicts the peculiarities of African-American language through the medium of socio-ideological text and culture to emphasize how language is used to create individual consciousness through the semantic and rhetorical strength of the language. On the relation between language and novel M.M. Bakhtin writes:

As a living socio-ideological concrete thing, as heteroglot opinion, language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in a language is half someone else’s. It becomes “one’s own” only when the speaker populates it with his intention, his accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive attention... Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily to the private property of the speaker’s intentions; it is populated –overpopulated –with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one’s intentions and accents is a challenging and complicated process. (1981, p. 294)

Bakhtin’s approach provides provocative discursive and sociolinguistic process of identity formation that empowers Hurston’s protagonist, Janie, in her journey. The text through metaphorical language depicts the complex relationship between language, knowledge, and power that is used as a tool for liberation. *Their Eyes*, in this sense, acts like a “dialogic text,” which stresses the social nature of language and speech events.

The text is abundant in vernacular speech, which shows how powerful dialect can be in empowering individuals to assert a sense of self. When Janie insults her husband, Jody Starks, by saying, “Humph! Talkin’ bout me lookin’ old! When you pull down yo’ britches, you look lak de

change uh life” (Hurston, 1937, p. 79), Hurston phonetically spells the words as they are spoken, dropping the final “g” from words such as talking and looking, and alters other words as well: “yo” for you and “lak” instead of like, and “uh” instead of the word of. Janie’s confronting her oppressive husband is a climactic moment in the novel. The outburst represents an expressive moment of resistance to hegemony and raising consciousness. The use of vernacular language and cultural referents in *Their Eyes*, as Bakhtin, succinctly puts, “permits the incorporation of various genres, both artistic [...] and extra-artistic” (1981, p. 320). These genres preserve their structural independence and integrity throughout the novel. These genres also “bring their languages, and therefore stratify the linguistic unity of the novel” that would strengthen the protagonist in her journey and would enable her to pass her story to the community dying to hear it (1981, p. 321). In this sense, the language used in *Their Eyes* is directly intentional. In other words, it is “the fully conceptualized philosophical dicta of the author” herself (1981, p. 322). The directly intentional metaphorical language that creates consciousness and challenges the legacy of slavery can be analyzed under three subtitles: objects as a metaphor, people as a metaphor, and animals as a metaphor, with the help of which the infrastructure of the novel is intertwined.

## Objects as Metaphor

*Their Eyes* is a spiritual, emotional, and physical journey of a young black woman, Janie Crawford, to self-realization, coming to age. Self-realization is gained through experience which is signified with the “horizon” metaphor. As a metaphorical construction, horizon is the source domain and self-realization is the target domain. The novel starts with “*Ships at a distance have every man’s wish on the board,*” which is a multilayered metaphor (Hurston, 1937, p. 1 emphasis in original). On the personal level “the ships” is an anthropological metaphor that symbolizes Janie’s dreams and her future self, while in the global level, it historically symbolizes the arrival of slavery through the middle passage as the ships remind the reader of the waterways that brought slaves to the American land. The second aims to deconstruct dominant discourse that created, shaped, and maintained the rhetoric of the oppressor in the form of economies of slavery. Janie, by leaving the “ships at a distance,” aims to leave the dominant rhetoric at a distance and free her from the oppressive ideology, which manifests itself in the form of patriarchal oppression, historical oppression, or sociological oppression.

Janie through her conscious choices leaves her first husband Logan, then the second one, Joe, and finally by leaving the Eatonville community, she walks out of the above mentioned oppressive ideologies. For that reason, she leaves the ships at the horizon and comes back to Eatonville at the very beginning of the novel. The conscious use of vernacular language and metaphors throughout the text dismantles the dominant rhetoric and helps the individuals “regain conversational (everyday) and literary language, ‘correct language’” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 666) which also registers “sociopolitical and cultural centralization” of black culture and consciousness (1981, p. 667). The second object that can be closely associated with the horizon and the ships is “the road” metaphor. Spatial elements also contributed to the search of subjectivity as the road both literally and metaphorically lead to Janie’s future where she can achieve her goal(s). Joe Starks, Janie’s second husband, waiting down the road represents a vehicle that would usher her to her dreams which include finding a real love and being “treated lak a real lady” (Hurston, 1937, p. 29). Her dreams and ambition are articulated as “She search(ed) as the much of the world...and leaned over to gaze up and down the road. Looking,

waiting, breathing short with impatience. Waiting for the world to be made” (1937, p. 11). ‘The road’ metaphor brings the horizon metaphor to a more tangible space where Janie can start her journey following her gazing up and down the road. Whatever she looks for is at the end of the road where she can reach only if she starts now. Therefore, she leaves her first husband Logan Killicks who gives nothing emotionally to Janie but acts like a crucial step in Janie’s life which initiates the awakening of ontological consciousness encouraging Janie to search for alternative ways to fulfill her quest. Her decision to leave Logan and travel down the road to the South with Joe Starks is a rhetorical shift from objects to people as metaphors. That is, the text shifts source domains from natural and inhuman elements to people: Joe and Tea Cake.

### People as Metaphor

Politics is a target domain that has to do with the exercise of power. Political power is conceptualized as physical and intellectual force. In *Their Eyes*, Janie’s second husband Joe Starks is used as a source domain to conceptualize and problematize the political power that subjugated black community and black female alike. Upon his arrival to Eatonville, Starks’ rhetoric, “Well, who tells you what to do” (Hurston, 1927, p. 35), displays this power when he asks where he can find the mayor. Joe Starks, as a source domain, acts as a metaphorical space that symbolizes that what Janie quests is not material wealth but powerful self. At this stage, she learns to resist exploitative and dominant ideologies that have constructed her sexuality and identity so far. In *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, Henry Louis Gates Jr. states that “Joe is not the embodiment of Janie’s tree, but he signifies the horizon” (Gates, 1997, p. 188). When Janie met Joe Starks, he was on his way to Southern Florida where colored people were building a town, Eatonville, for themselves. When Joe suggested Janie to leave Logan Killicks and go with him, Janie thinks about the opportunities he can provide her because Logan “did not represent sun-up and pollen and blooming in trees, but he spoke for far horizon” (Hurston, 1937, p. 29). This emphasizes that Joe becomes a tree metaphor that might represent “pollen and blooming” because “he spoke for change and chance” (1937, p. 50). However, it turns out that Joe is not Janie’s final destination as the horizon is always ahead if people have not reached or achieved what they want. Joe provided Janie with comfort and social status as Miss Mayor, but Janie soon realizes that it is not social and material wellbeing that represents the horizon for her because Janie got no pleasure from them, and there was no fulfillment. As Joe makes Eatonville into a modern community, he directs its citizens through his power of persuasion. Some folks in town say that “[Joe] loves obedience out of everybody under de sound of his voice.” While Others complement by saying “You kin feel a switch in his hand when he’s talkin’ to yuh . . .” (1937, p. 40). The power and control over the public transform Joe’s into a character that symbolizes hegemonic and patriarchal power.

This shift is apparent when he starts to consider Janie as a possession rather than his beloved wife because he does not give her any right to explain her ideas, think solutions for the problems, or act freely in public. With his new role, Joe is not different from the hegemonic ideology that dehumanized, subjugated, and exploited the black female body. To complicate and challenge his role and status, Hurston employs the aesthetic power of language. The subjugation and possession are articulated through Joe’s use of language. When Joe was chosen as the mayor of the town, people appreciated his contribution to the development of the town. They exchanged praises and following Joe Starks’ speech,

one of the residents, Tony Taylor, asked Mrs. Starks to make a speech too, yet Joe interrupted and stated that “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” (1937, p. 43). Through this response, Hurston problematizes subversion of black female body. In addition to that, through this dialogue, Hurston brings her social and political criticism to a level which complicates the exploitation of the black female body by a black male. To do so, Hurston furnishes her protagonist Janie with intellectual capacity that would rhetorically challenge her oppressor.

From this point of view, Joe becomes a metaphor that symbolizes how material appetite can transform honest feelings into cruel and oppressive actions. Janie challenges this ideology and approach through her rhetorical discourse because she realizes that “language is a terrain of power relations” (Carby, 1987, p. 16). Hazel Carby states that no language or experience is divorced from the shared context in which different groups that share a language express their differing group interest (1987, p. 16). She further develops her argument saying that “language is accented differently by competing groups, and therefore the terrain of language is a terrain of power relations” (1987, p.16). This struggle within and over language reveals the nature of the structure of social relations and the hierarchy of power. Patricia Hill Collins states that “the shadow obscuring the Black Women’s intellectual tradition is neither accidental nor benign” (Collins, 1990, p. 5). She further claims that “too many African American women intellectuals have labored in isolation and obscurity” (1990, p. 5). Within this context, the following scene is crucial as a moment of awakening and resistance as Janie speaks out for her rights. Janie realizes that rhetorical usage of language can liberate the oppressed and she knows that there are times that one must keep quiet and those that one must challenge the oppression. Janie displays her intellectual capacity to “emasculate” her husband publicly upon his humiliation of her. Janie’s reaction did not happen in a vacuum. There are many events that contributed to her strength culminating with the emasculating her husband. The reader witness her intellectual capacity and patience when Janie was working in their shop to help Joe. Janie manages the shop better and serves the customers more appropriately. Her intellectual capacity is noticed by the community in Eatonville who started to respect her. The chain of events such as asking her to cover her head, not to come to the shop anymore, and just cook and wait at home for him, brought her to this point. It is one of those moments that she acts consciously and knows what she wants to do which “was something that hadn’t been done before” (1937, p. 56):

*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’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.* (2006, p. 79, emphasis in original)

The phrase “big voice” is an accusation that punctures Jody’s sexual, political, and even economic power. After this discussion, the readers witness that Joe Starks physically and psychologically collapses. With the power of language, Janie would be able to speak with authority about her husband’s virility or lack of it. The power of language and determination enables self-realization for a suppressed woman, Janie. It also helps Janie to disyoke herself from being suppressed and silenced; one of the characteristics of multiple jeopardy.

This patriarchal oppression, both white and black, represented by Logan Killicks and Joe Starks, and the mule metaphor conjures up Deborah. K. King's term *multiple jeopardy* (King, 1988, p. 47). In 1972, Frances Beale introduced the term *double jeopardy* to describe the dual discriminations of racism and sexism that subjugate black women. Black people, in general, suffered racial discrimination and mistreatment. In addition to this, black women were confronted with sexual abuse and had to cope with oppression coming from both white and black men. According to King "such preponderant majority of black women have endured the very lowest wages and very poorest conditions of rural and urban poverty that some scholars have argued that economic class oppression must necessarily constitute a third jeopardy" (1988, p. 47). In other words, racism, sexism, and classicism became components of multiple jeopardy from which black women suffered the most. In this sense, Janie's distancing herself from the porch people and thus from the being the mule of the world can be read as a resistance to triple jeopardy. Liberating herself from being a possession and abuse of her husbands, Killicks and Starks, Janie dismantles the components of triple jeopardy.

Janie has many dreams: carnal and spiritual. Some dreams come true, while others fail. At the opening scene, the narrative voice highlights how male and female dream differently. For women "the dream is the truth," and they "act and do things accordingly" (Hurston, 1937, p. 1). Observing the pear tree blossoming, she wonders where and how she can find such an ecstasy and dreams of discovering true life and her sexuality through a coital union, a "bee to her blossom," and most importantly to be a liberated black woman (Hurston, 1937, p. 126). In search of her dreams, she wonders "where were the singing bees for her? Nothing on the place nor in her grandmother's house answered her" (1937, p.11). Janie articulates her dream to her Nanny, "Ah wants things sweet wid marriage lak when you sit under a pear tree and think" (1937, p.24). She expresses her dream marriage: loving, peaceful, and comfortable. However, her dreams about her marriages do not come true until her third husband Tea Cake because "she knew that marriage did not make love. Janie's first dream was dead, so she became a woman" (1937, p.25). Janie's dream fails when she leaves Killicks for Joe Starks. In her second marriage, in which she desired to find real love and freedom, Janie realizes that she is one of her husband's possessions. Her womanhood is acknowledged only in terms of patriarchal standard of living, which confines a woman into domestic space to serve her master. Janie realizes that Jody "did not represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees, but he spoke for far horizon" (1937, p, 50). Her conscious life that started with the pear tree scene enriched with this moment of enlightenment, which urges her to start her struggle to achieve her dreams and find her love and self.

Using the phrase of "big voice," Janie kills her husband rhetorically when she humiliates Joe; this humiliation before his friends is not accidental, rather a conscious and intellectual behavior that challenges appropriation of the black female body. Unable to respond to Janie verbally, Joe uses physical power to subdue Janie and "struck[s] Janie with all his might and drove her from the store" (1937, p. 56). Suppressing the knowledge produced by any oppressed group makes it easier for dominant groups to rule the oppressed because the seeming "absence of an independent consciousness in the oppressed can be taken to mean that subordinate groups willingly collaborate in their victimization" (Collins, 1990, p. 5). Through Joe Starks's language, Hurston particularly problematizes the dramatic transformations within black culture. Joe's speech brings the gender dynamics into play and implies that this second stage in her journey would not create enough opportunity for Janie's fulfillment. This stage obscures the rich ontological and epistemological strength that would liberate her and usher her to her horizon.

Jean Toomer, a significant poet, and writer in Harlem renaissance, states that “Black women whose spirituality was so intense, so deep, so unconscious, that they were themselves unaware of the richness they held” (Walker, 1983, p. 1). The seeming absence of independent consciousness is clear in Janie’s later response to Jody when he asks her to take care of the shop. “Oh Jody, Ah can’t do nothin’ wid no store when things git rushed, but” (1937, p. 43). Thus, Joe becomes another step to carry Janie into the third stage in her journey as “She had been getting ready for her great journey to the horizons in search of *people*; it was important to all the world that she should find them and they find her” (1937, p. 89). After Joe’s death, Janie resolves to follow her dream to journey to the horizon in search of true love and self-actualization. She meets and marries Tea Cake who is symbolically the last step that she achieves her dream and reaches the *horizon*.

Tea Cake is also used not only as a significant character but as a metaphor for her journey. Janie finds sensual and emotional love with Tea Cake. Tea Cake guides her to deeper understanding of local black culture such as the expressive codes of storytelling. Janie has introduced all aspects of life from working in the muck to playing games, from being beaten due to jealousy to killing the man she loved dearly. This relationship helps her spiritual and personal development. Tea Cake teaches Janie a deeper understanding of African- American culture in addition to daily practical knowledge such as how to play checkers, how to shoot, and how to drive a car. Within this relationship, Janie and Tea Cake are equal in many terms as they distinguish themselves from the power structure of her former marriages. This relationship teaches her equality, festivity, jealousy, and most importantly she enables her to find “herself glowing inside” (1937, p. 67). Through Tea Cake’s relationship, Janie meets the people “on the muck,” which prescribes a community free of class and racial divisions imposed by dominant ideology. The rhetorical stance of the text is in the following manner:

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? The crowd of people around her and a dice game on her floor! . . . The men held big arguments here like they used to do on the store porch. Only here, she could listen and laugh and *even talk some herself if she wanted to*. She got so she could tell big stories herself from listening to the rest. Because she loved to hear it, and the men loved to hear themselves, they would “woof” and “boogerboo” around the games to the limit. (1937, p. 90 emphasis added)

Janie realized that on the muck people were “dancing, fighting, singing, crying, laughing, winning, and losing love every hour. Work all day for money, fight all night for love” (1937, p. 89). This realization becomes a turning point in her self-actualization because, Edwidge Dandicat writes, Janie’s “life and travels with him have opened up her world and her heart in irreversible ways” (xxi). Although Janie loved him dearly, she ultimately chooses to live and not to die with him, and her final act is not to follow him to the grave, but to bury him and return alone to a community. Her act underscores the fact that Tea Cake was not a final destination but a metaphor that symbolizes freedom and spiritual fulfillment. Jani admits to Pheoby “So Ah’m back home agin and Ah’m satisfied tuh be heah. Ah done been to de horizon and back and now Ah kin set heah in mah house and live by comparisons” (225).



## Animals as Metaphor

The domain of animals is an extremely productive source domain. Human beings are frequently understood in terms of properties of animals. We, for example, talk about someone being a snake, a mule, a brute, a bear, a wolf, a sly fox, a cow, and so on. The usage of animal metaphors, which is a characteristic of Afro-American vernacular language, contributed to the integrity of the novel. There are two animal metaphors that are used in *Their Eyes*. Probably the most striking one is the *mule* metaphor which has both philosophical and political dimensions. The reader first comes across with this metaphor when Janie returns from Everglades after burying Tea Cake. She finds folks sitting on the porch with their judging eyes. These people “had been tongueless, earless, eyeless, conveniences all they long. *Mules* and other *brutes* had occupied their skins. But now, the sun and the boss man were gone, so their skins felt powerful and human” (1937, p.1 emphasis added). The folks, mostly the women, sitting on the porch talking about Janie’s return, were associated with the *mule* devoid of any ability to think, hear, and speak during the day in the presence of oppressive power. The only action they display during the day was to follow the masters’ orders in return for a bunch of food and a shelter, which does not need any intellectual capacity. It is significant that Janie does not interact with them, which signifies that on the muck one of the things that Janie discovered is the human self within human skin. Thus she distances herself from being “de mule uh the world” that keeps occupying the skins of her race (1937, p. 14).

During his visit to the South in the early twenties, Toomer explains the historical and metaphorical function of being a *mule* as follows:

Exquisite butterflies trapped in an evil honey, toiling away their lives in an era, a century, which did not acknowledge them, except as “*the mule of the world.*” They dreamed dreams that no one knew-not even themselves, in any coherent fashion-and saw visions no one could understand. They wandered or sat about the countryside crooning lullabies to ghosts, and drawing the mother of Christ in charcoal on courthouse walls. (Walker, 1983. p. 2, emphasis added)

The mule is the sign under which Janie’s marriage to Joe Starks unfolds. The metaphor of the mule is repeated many times during the novel. Through Nanny’s discourse, historical narrative is problematized when Nanny articulates that “De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see” (1937, p. 14). Joe and Janie’s relationship is interwoven with the fate of the mule. The *mule* is any and all “underclass” and summarizes power relations of class, race, and gender. When Joe buys Matt Bonner’s mule; Janie’s request from Joe to free the mule is an ambiguous action attributing Joe the position of great emancipator and implying that even the mule is free, but not Janie. When I say Janie is not free, I mean that the freedom represents the ability to speak freely and participate in the folks’ porch activities, or in another way to the social life on the porch. It is true that Janie’s consciousness is alive, but she is not free to put what she imagines and believes into practice in her daily life. She has to act the role that her husband defined for her. When Joe bought the mule and freed it, Janie put Joe in place of Abraham Lincoln: “Freein’ that mule makes uh mighty big man outa you. Something like George Washington and Lincoln: Abraham Lincoln, he had de whole United States tuh rule, so he freed de Negroes” (1937, p. 58). Freeing of the mule is associated with the freeing of Negroes. In this sense, the *mule* metaphor is used to symbolize the slaves and slavery in the United States.

The other animal metaphor is *the parson* in the buzzard scene. When Matt Bonner’s mule is dead, the black males of Eatonville, including Mayor Starks, dragged the mule to the edge of the hammock. Everybody listens while Starks is making a ceremonial speech. After the people leave, the buzzards approach to the mule in circles and wait for the *Parson*. Parson is the one, a leader, which has control and authority on the other buzzards. It might be possible to say that the parson symbolizes dominant power. In *Their Eyes*, Joe acts like a parson in his community. He is the leader of the community, and unless he says something or makes an order, the others do not do anything. He believes that some folks cannot think; therefore, he will speak on their behalf: “Somebody got to think for women and chillun and chickens and cows. I god, they sho don’t think none theirselves” (1937, p. 71). The oppressive power of the *parson* is accentuated by Joe Starks when he defines himself as “I god.” While the parson is the leader of the community that leads them, the buzzards represent the variety in the community. The variety in Hurston’s novel, as Walker states, is represented throughout the careful selection of the vocabulary, “The town had a basketful of feelings good and bad about Joe’s position, but none had the temerity to challenge him” (1937, p. 50). The buzzard metaphor has multilevel functions: political, social, and religious. After the emancipation, the hegemonic power liberated the *mules* but left them on their own without any orientation or supporting program. As in the town of Eatonville, people did not know any legal and official issues and manners well; therefore, some “parsons” took the role of dominant power and abused and exploited the oppressed. The people in the community that have just had an opportunity as free men to establish a town knew nothing about how to do it. Like the buzzards, they make noises by telling stories and playing checkers on the porch. Hurston criticizes the community for not taking any initiatives and challenge oppression no matter where it comes from. As long as people follow others unquestionably and do not develop alternative ways of thinking and critical awareness, communities will not liberate themselves from exploitative systems of economy, whether the system shows itself as slavery, capitalism, or any other forms of oppression. Ultimately, this situation will be a great obstacle to the realization of subjectivity.

In conclusion, through the use of vernacular language and various metaphors, Hurston gives her character a spiritual grounding that will ensure a proper balance so that self-fulfillment and sex becomes naturalized in the novel as part of human development rather than sensationalized to demonstrate black aberration (Weir-Soley, 2009, p. 40). Hurston considered female problems and the representation of black women as one of the fundamentals of self-realization. She used a series of metaphors of objects, people, and animals as vehicles to portray the condition of black female and community in her work. With the help of these metaphors, Hurston negates the stereotypes of intellectually dull and submissive black women, and black female emerges as an individual free from all bonds and prejudices which are able to shape and control her future. In *Their Eyes*, Hurston used vernacular speech to avoid class distinctions in the black community. The sentence structure and word choice gave her characters a chance to talk on their own. The power of language enabled the oppressed to represent them and destroyed the patriarchal hegemony on women creating equal opportunities for both sexes. Janie can accomplish her goal of self-realization psychologically on the road from a subservient wife of Logan Killings and Joe Starks, and finally to a sensuously happy one with subjectivity through her relationship with Tea cake. Hurston’s critique of inequality and oppression on black women contributed to the consciousness movement in the Harlem Renaissance on the representation of intelligent, self-esteemed, strong African-American characters within the black community that will enable great enlightenment to the whole community.

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