

## Their Eyes Were Watching God: Janie's Journey

When reading any story, the reader is often introduced to the protagonist in their “natural habitat,” in order to get acquainted. As a conflict arises, both the reader and the main character undergo a journey, though not always literal, that allows the reader to witness the protagonist transform into a better version of themselves in order to prove a point, solve a conflict, or express a theme. This is known as a monomyth, or the “Hero's Journey.” When breaking down the components of a plot, the Hero's Journey often ends with a trek back to where it all began, only this time the character is more developed and wiser than before. Janie, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston is a perfect example of a Hero undergoing a journey only to end up exactly where they started. Her endeavors to fall in love and to be loved, took her all over the deep south, only to end up alone, but with a sense of power.

The novel begins with a young version of Janie being raised by her grandmother who was a former slave. The beginning of Janie's story begins when she becomes sexually aware of herself and kisses a boy to her grandmother's horror. Due to the atrocious experiences of Janie's grandmother as a slave, she believes that life is not worth living without wealth, security, and the ability to progress. Seeing that Janie was starting to express this newly found side of herself rapidly, she forces Janie to marry a wealthy, yet undesirable man named Logan Killicks. Janie dreaded the idea of marrying Killicks because not only was he unattractive to her, but he was more than twice her age, made Janie perform back-breaking work daily on his farm, and never allowed Janie to travel to town with him. It did not take long for Janie to grow tired of a loveless

marriage. Fate would have it that she would then meet Jody Starks, the soon to be mayor of Eatonville. Janie decides to run away with him, thus launching the journey that lay ahead of her.

Janie claims that she wanted to experience love repeatedly throughout the novel. It is later revealed that she realizes how she also wanted to remain independent in the process. After twenty years with Jody Starks, Janie realizes that she did experience love like she wanted, however her independence became imprisoned like her long tresses trapped under the headscarf that Jody forced her to wear. The love in their marriage dissipated throughout the years, causing Janie little to no sorrow once he expired. Now an old woman, unable to bear children, Janie is thrilled to have her independence back. Not long after, she then encounters a man that goes only by the name of Tea Cake. He is much younger than her, but still pursues Janie despite her age. She is hesitant at first but soon enters the third part of her lifelong quest. Ignoring the snark comments of her peers and the pleads of the ones who did care about her, Janie ran away with her new lover to the Everglades.

This final chapter of Janie's journey allowed her to experience both the independence and love that took her years to find. Tea Cake gave her the youth that she lost in two loveless marriages. The two married quickly, causing Janie to express gratitude upon ever meeting Tea Cake. The main character describes that she felt as if her life had finally begun, despite how many years it took to find Tea Cake. However, Janie's journey was not quite complete. In the passing of Tea Cake, Janie walked barefoot all the way back to Eatonville, where she initially thought her life had begun. She provides her one and only friend a detailed recap of the events of her life that lead her to the very end of her journey. Janie was able to experience the love that she dreamed about as a young girl, all while keeping the independence that made her stand out against her peers.

The journey of Janie allowed her to realize that the love she so desperately sought after came on its own time. Even after she got to experience her enduring dream, it was abruptly taken away from her, encouraging her to realize that the most important love she could ever experience is the love she has for herself. Janie dropped everything and ran away with someone twice, which later proved that she was willing to make big decisions with the idea of bettering herself in mind. She learned to ignore the opinions of others around her, seeing that they only hindered her and her personal accomplishments. The unconditional love one can have for themselves is the most important love to have. Even though the death of Tea Cake was unfortunate, Janie had come to peace realizing that the true love she sought after had been within her all along. The story then suggests that Janie lives the rest of her life in complete bliss having experienced the phenomena of her own detailed monomyth.

To conclude, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* brings the reader on an epic journey with the protagonist only to end with the understanding that sometimes the answers to lasting desires are closer than they appear. Janie returned to the exact location where the story of her life seemingly took off, only this time she had become more patient with herself and excited about where life would bring her next knowing that she had finally completed her journey of true love.

## Works Cited

Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. New York: HarperLuxe, 2008. Print.