

The Cognitive Construction of the Self in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

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Patrick S. Bernard,

"The Cognitive Construction of the Self in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*"

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Abstract: In his article, "The Cognitive Construction of the Self in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," Patrick S. explores the conception and representation of the self as a cognitive construct in Zora Neale Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. By this approach, Bernard proposes that cognitive paradigms, such as knowing, seeing, thinking, and speaking, for example, and their capacities to engender knowledge and perception, identity and consciousness, memory and narrative, language and speech, are central to the novel's exploration of the self as an epistemological and ideological product. Using tools of interpretation adapted from cognitive psychology and radical constructivism, Bernard proposes in his analysis of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* that the claim of the self as a cognitive-derived, constructed agent is central to the novel's discourse on self-formation and the constructivist philosophy that underlies it. In cognitive psychology the self is understood as contextual, or ecological, intertwining cognitive capacities with social experiences and Bernard's analysis affirms the novel's narrative where the self develops through cognitive and cultural interconnections.

Patrick S. BERNARD

The Cognitive Construction of the Self in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Zora Neale Hurston's novel *Their Eyes were Watching God* represents the growth of the protagonist Janie from a naïve girl to a mature woman. Janie captures this pivotal transition when she observes, "the young girl was gone, but a handsome woman had taken her place" (83). This growth of the heroine to some form of self-formation has been the dominant critical approach to the novel. Therefore, interpretations of the novel have focused, and continue to focus, on Janie's psychological, emotional, physical, folkloric, feminist, linguistic, and spiritual self (see, e.g., Carby; Holloway; McKay; Johnson; Wall; Kubitschek; Gates; Silber; McMillan; Loudun; Deffenbacher; Racine). I contend that one approach whose application in the analysis of the novel's discourse of self-formation that has not received attention is the field of cognition. Thus, in the article at hand I explore the novel's conception and representation of the self as a cognitive construct. By this approach I posit that cognitive paradigms such as knowing, seeing, thinking, and speaking, for example, and their capacities to engender knowledge and perception, identity and consciousness, memory and narrative, language and speech are central to the novel's exploration of the self. My use of cognition is guided by this point: I am not talking of cognition from the point of view of cerebral, intellectual, higher mental processes; rather, I focus on social cognition, which directly relates to human living, and perceives the self as an epistemological and ideological product.

Ample references to the cognizing self dominate the novel's worldview. In fact, cognitive capacities frame Janie's observation of her growth from a young girl to a handsome woman: "She thought about herself. Years ago, she had told her girl self to wait for her in the looking glass. It had been a long time since she remembered. Perhaps she'd better look" (83). This "look"[ing], an act of reflection (aptly captured by the "looking glass"), leads her to take "careful stock of herself" (83), with her "girl self" (83) serving as the foundation for this mental stocktaking that she accesses via the related cognitive acts of remembering, thinking and memory. Moreover, "to take careful stock of herself" represents one of the ways Janie understands the self as a transaction and a product that grows and changes physically and cognitively. When Janie returns to Eatonville after burying her third husband Tea Cake, she tells her best friend Pheoby, to whom she is about to narrate her life story, "you must think Ah brought yuh something' when ain't brought home a thing but mahself" (4). Here, Janie views the self as a material possession or thing ("something") that she can bring for Pheoby. In another episode, Janie tells Pheoby that all she wanted to do to circumvent the constricting effect Jody, her second husband, had on her quest for self-fulfillment was "tuh utilize mahself all over" (107). Here, Janie considers the self as a utility, meaning a practical, and even profitable, thing that she can make to work. To utilize further suggests Janie's understanding of the self as convertible, exchangeable, or replaceable. When one of Janie's classmates tells her that "you don't know yo' ownself" (9), the classmate associates the self with an ownership that comes through cognitive and epistemological awareness ("know"). Also her grandmother, Nanny, advises Janie: "when you get big enough to understand things, Ah wanted you to look upon yo'self" (19). Nanny sees the self as an object, a possession, but one that is also a product of the cognitive capacities of "understanding" and "look" and their related processes of perception, vision, and memory. Crucially, however, Nanny also tells Janie: "Neither can you stand alone by yo'self" (15), a qualification suggesting that the self is not just a bundle of cerebral impulses and networks, but a cultural interface that realizes itself in community. Janie seems to have heeded Nanny's advice because after Jody's death she contemplates: "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" (85; emphasis in original). She realizes that the self emerges from the interaction between her cognitive learning and her society, represented primarily by her Grandma, first, second, and third husbands, Logan Killicks, Jody Starks, and Tea Cake respectively, and generally by the Eatonville community, which wrongly believes that the categories of woman and

self are mutually exclusive. For this community, "uh woman by herself is uh pitiful thing" and "dey [women] needs aid and assistance. God never meant 'em tuh try tuh stand by theirselves" (86).

These axiological claims of stock, thing, and utility reinforce a materialist conception of the self, a thing with a mind, feeling and agency. However, Janie counterbalances this conception with her view of the self as an ideal, abstract entity as well. She captures this duality thus: "Then one day she sat and watched the shadow of herself going about tending store and prostrating itself before Jody, while all the time she herself sat under a shady tree with wind blowing through her hair and her clothes" (73). She negotiates both by embarking on a project of finding how the material and the abstract mutually constitute her self. Moreover, Janie claims a dialectical understanding of the self when she asserts that the goal of self-formation is for her to find herself in others and vice versa. This project defines what I call Janie's philosophy of the self, a philosophy on which she later elaborates when she tells Pheoby that her goal in life is that people "got tuh find out about livin' fuh theyselves" (183). This philosophy affirms that the self is experiential, even phenomenological, where "tuh find out" posits self-formation as a process of discovery and adaptability, an observation, an experience, and a quest to obtain knowledge, awareness and consciousness. In this sense, "tuh find out" is also constitutive of cognitive processes of interpretation, intentions, plans, and memories. Her philosophy suggests the instrumentality of the self is revealed via narrative. Thus the self-as-story undergirds this philosophy as well because as the narrator states, "Janie [is] full of that oldest human longing—self-revelation" (6; cognitive inquiries into storytelling have transformed our understanding and explanation of the self as a construct and a narrative center, see, e.g., Bruner; Schank; McAdams; Marshall). Philosophical questions define Janie's project of "tuh find": "She was seeking confirmation of the voice and the vision, and everywhere she found and acknowledged answers. She felt an answer seeking. But where? When? How?" (11). These are epistemological questions in the sense that they relate self-knowing to vision; but they are ideological questions as well that speak to her experience as a black woman in search of voice. Voice and vision are cognitive-emotive as well as psycho-cultural trajectories central to Janie's philosophy. Inscribed in this philosophy also are two other interrelated concepts of "change and chance" (28), which further buttress Janie's fundamental belief that self-formation is contextual, transactional, and mobile. Janie's philosophy conceives of the self as a constructive agent and its outcome as a cognitive and social product. Thus, *Their Eyes* directly suggests that the self is constituted.

The claim of the self as a cognitive-derived, constructed agent is central to the novel's discourse on self-formation and the constructivist philosophy that underlies it. Cognitive psychology, in particular, affirms that the self develops through cognitive and cultural interconnections. For this reason, cognitive psychology views the self as contextual, or ecological, intertwining cognitive capacities with social experiences. In turn, cognitive psychology in the present context falls within the broader view of constructivist philosophy, which sees the self as an artifact, something we build, make and constitute. Radical constructivism affirms that "knowledge is not passively received but actively built up by the cognizing subject. ... The function of cognition is adaptive; it serves the organization of the experiential world, not the discovery of ontological reality" (Riegler <<http://www.radicalconstructivism.com>>); radical constructivism "starts with the assumption that knowledge, no matter how it is defined, is in the heads of persons, and that the thinking subject has no alternative but to construct what he or she does know on the basis of his or her own experiences" (Glaserfeld 1). These constructivist approaches suggest that the self changes and grows. One instrument such approaches have used to explain this claim is the cognitive study of metaphor that explains metaphor as a language product of thought, knowledge, and consciousness (see Turner; Lakoff and Turner; for constructivist metaphors see Spivey): a metaphor "is a pattern of thought that underlies our cognition and knowledge generally, including our cognition and knowledge about our daily worlds" (Turner 9-10). According to Nancy Nelson Spivey, "cognitive studies of metaphors claim that humans, either as individuals or as collectives, use metaphors as constructive agents, and their meanings and

knowledge as constructed products" (2). Thus, the cognitive understanding of metaphor provides explanatory dimensions that view the self as constructive. Further, the feminist psychologist Ellyn Kaschack captures this interstice of cognition, metaphor, and self when she observes that the self is an "abstract concept by means of which meaning and consistency are attributed to a person in context. The very sense of self is a metaphor, an organizing concept ... which includes the physical, affective, and cognitive experiences associated with this metaphor. The emerging sense of self is a set of abstract symbols and, at the same time, an embodiment of the abstract" (154). This claim of the self as an organizing concept can be used to understand Janie's philosophy of "tuh find out," which is a metaphor that explains her physical, affective, and cognitive experiences. Henry Louis Gates Jr. observes that "Janie is a master of metaphor whose self-liberation awaits only the knowledge of how to narrate her figures contiguously" (206; see also Johnson for metaphor and metonymy; Raynaud for metaphor in the novel). Janie uses nature to understand the self as an abstract and material entity when the narrator states that Janie "knew the world was a stallion rolling in the blue pasture of ether. She knew that God tore down the old world every evening and built a new one by sun-up. It was wonderful to see it take form with the sun and emerge from the gray dust of its making" (24). This extended metaphor makes a vital connection between nature and the self: God constructs the world (nature) as a continuous process of making and re-making. Analogically, Janie sees herself as a "god" who wields the power to make and remake her self. In her view, the self, like nature, is not a stagnant object, but one that "take[s] form" and "emerge[s]." This metaphor posits a constructivist teleology, buttressing Kaschack's point that the emerging sense of self is a set of abstract symbols and, at the same time, an embodiment of the abstract.

Janie uses the self-as-nature metaphor to consider the self both as a material object and an abstract entity (73) combined by language, human mind and memory. The related "tree" metaphor anchors this duality. There is the actual physical "blossoming pear tree in the back yard" (10) of Nanny's living quarters that Janie uses to understand her emerging sense of self. She "spends every minute that she could steal from her chores under the tree," whose "first tiny bloom ... call[s] her to come and gaze on a mystery" (10). The tree "stir[s] her tremendously" by generating epistemological and ontological questions of "How? Why?" and "What?" that "emerged and quested about her consciousness" (10). Janie transforms this physical tree into an abstract one she uses to metaphorically speak about the self. For example, the narrator makes this direct connection between Janie's sense of self and this metaphorical tree: "Janie saw her life like a tree in leaf" (8). Janie, in one of her contemplations, makes this indirect link when she observes: "Oh to be a pear tree -- any tree in bloom!" (11). This metaphor affirms the capacity "to be," and its ontological suggestion of becoming, emerging, and being. Both the simile and the metaphor associate the self with the attributes of the pear tree: blossoming, flourishing, and maturation. This metaphorical tree anchors theories of self and its representation, knowledge and being, and the transformative modes of consciousness. It further signifies a model and an ideal for the self, and Janie invests the metaphor with cognitive capacities. In fact, many of the cognitive paradigms in the novel relate to this metaphor.

One of the cognitive paradigms in the novel is seeing. *Their Eyes* foregrounds seeing, or what Janie refers to as vision, as one of the bases for self-construction (see Clark; Burrows; Maynaud for their examination of vision and visuality in the novel). The novel privileges the eye and the related processes of perception and recognition, and the metaphorical tree is central to this undertaking. The simile referenced above captures this connection between seeing, the tree and the self. The pear tree, both as a physical and an abstract entity, anchors acts of gazing, and provides Janie the visual means to shape and reshape her concept and experience of the self. In particular, the metaphorical pear tree holds emotional and rational experiences that, after every gazing, make Janie modify her notion of the self. In this regard, she realizes that the "vision of Logan Killicks was desecrating the pear tree" (13). She also sees Jody as an unfulfilled pear tree: he "did not represent sun-up and pollen and blossoming trees" (28). She says that Tea Cake "could be a bee to a blossom -- a pear tree blossom in spring"

(101). Each gaze at these metaphorical pear trees opens possibilities for self-realization, making looking at the pear tree a conscious act of interpretation. In fact, the title of the novel affirms a visual epistemology. The novel suggests that self-understanding is perception-driven, a view Hurston refers to as "trying to see beyond seeing" (162) to describe the capacity of seeing as death-defying. Therefore, the idea of seeing beyond seeing posits a metaphysical and metaphorical basis for visual discernment. It means that, for the self as a living entity, the perceptual system tolerates ambiguity and possibilities for choices. To "see" beyond "seeing" is to put the self on multiple planes (symbolic and abstract, real and material) that allow Janie to imagine and negotiate the dichotomous nature and slippages of an inner self and an outer self. Seeing beyond seeing is an inner imagining capacity that anchors Janie's imagination and creativity. It enables her to imagine alternative ways for, and create images of, the self not determined by her environment. In this sense, seeing beyond seeing is Hurston's, and by extension Janie's, definition of the imagination as a resilient, enduring, and flexible capacity that facilitates, if not originates, self-invention and-reinvention. To see in this manner is to affirm the perceptual basis of human knowledge. There are instances in the novel where we witness Janie's capacity of seeing beyond seeing. For example, the picture incident at school brings a "seeing" that leads Janie to recognize that she is different racially from "de rest" (9). In another episode, Janie sees beyond the limiting confines of the store because the customers allowed "the picture of their thoughts for others to look and see. The fact that the thought pictures were always crayon enlargements of life made it even richer to listen to" (48). In addition to thought pictures, there are what Nanny refers to as "mind-pictures" (16), which also suggest the capacity of seeing beyond seeing. Thought pictures and mind pictures connect the complex interrelationship between seeing and thinking as mutually constituting processes in self-formation.

Thinking is the other cognitive paradigm in the novel, which narrates how Janie thinks about herself, intentions and plans, desires and beliefs. In fact, one of Janie's most frequently used words in *Their Eyes* is "think." Janie wants to think, and be given the opportunity to do so because she realizes that thinking facilitates reasoning and decision-making, two essential attributes of the self. The pear tree anchors her thinking. Janie goes "back and forth to the pear tree continuously wondering and thinking" (20) about her first marriage; when Logan fails to meet her expectations in the marriage, she says, crying, "Ah wants things sweet wid mah marriage lak when you sit under a pear tree and think" (23). The operative words in Janie's observation are "think" and "pear tree." The latter provides Janie the scope for making assumptions, conclusions, and inferences about her self in marriage. Thinking, therefore, has real ideological consequences, particularly in the novel's gender relations. One reason for the marital conflicts between Janie and Jody is over who should control Janie's thinking. Jody believes, wrongly, that "Somebody got to think for women and chillun and chickens and cows. I god, they sho don't think none theirselves." Janie's reply to Jody is pointed: "Ah knows uh few things, and women folks *thinks* sometimes too!" (67; emphasis added). Jody privileges the intrinsic masculinity of thought; for him, thinking is male property. His statement that Janie, like all women, cannot think reinforces discarded socio-cultural representations of the hierarchy of knowledge, where men are rational beings and women mere emotional creatures incapable of making abstract and rational thought. For Jody, not surprising, Janie is his "pretty doll-baby" (28), a view that shows his perception of Janie not as a thinking person, but a thought-less object. The "doll-baby" is an object that lacks cognition -- brain, mind, language, consciousness -- and Jody uses the reference to posit his notion of the unthinking woman. In Jody's patriarchal world-view, feminine knowledge, which he believes "lacks" thinking, is less worthy of the human. Therefore, for Jody, Janie and all women stand on the same cognitive level with animals such as chickens and cows. Janie's response that a woman is a human being with a human body and a human brain is pointed and emphatic. She implies that Jody's wrong assumption that women cannot think rests on cultural factors, and not on cognition. Thinking, in general, involves abstraction and assumptions, attributes that make the self human. Janie uses these attributes to disprove Jody's wrong notion of her lack of thinking. For example, the way she associ-

ates thinking and the pear tree allows her to derive implications and conclusions, abstractions and assumptions about the self. In essence, to think allows Janie to hypothesize, interpret, infer, and deduce about the self. Moreover, thinking, in general, is contemplation. According to Stephen Kosslyn, "thinking is the ability to contemplate something in its absence" (72). It is in contemplation that the self derives its imaginative and creative sensibilities. Linking thinking, the imagination and the creative impulses as interrelated cognitive acts, Eric Harth states, "creativity is the ability to contemplate something that has never existed before" (74). This claim recognizes the centrality of creativity and imagination in self-formation.

Janie uses the pear tree to contemplate, imagine, and create a self that has never existed before. The narrator says, "sometimes [Janie] stuck out into future, imagining her life different from what it was" (72). It is this ability to "imagine" that drives her quest to reinvent herself at crucial moments in the novel. For instance, when leaving Logan, she realizes a "feeling of sudden newness and change came over her" (31), believing that "change was bound to do her good" (31). This newness can comprise the idea of "saving feelings for some man she had never seen" (68). Janie's contemplative mind once again disproves Jody's wrong idea of her lack of the capacity to think. Janie realizes that when others think for her, they control her imagination and creativity and, in essence, become interpreters of what her self ought to be. She also recognizes that since thinking is the capacity to reason, she must consciously master its logic of survival if she is to have a self. For Janie, therefore, the practical is logical. In her relationships and encounters with others, she reasons and comes to the conclusion that what they think the self is cannot be (always) right. For example, she reasons deductively here: "Ah done live grandma's way, now Ah means tuh live mine" (86). To a certain extent, Janie follows the claims of Nanny (and Killicks and Jody) to generate conclusions about the self. She discovers, however, that their reasoning violates her own thinking because they make claims and draw invalid inferences and conclusions that thwart selfhood. Therefore, she uses the same inferences and comes to different conclusions. By so thinking, she realizes that there are alternative ways to construct the self.

The capacities thinking and seeing generate such as imagination, creativity, contemplation, inferences, and assumptions are acts of knowing as well. To know represents the other cognitive paradigm in the novel. Knowing, in general, is the primary means the self uses to set its goals, realize its limitations, and negotiate its uncertainties and contradictions. In *Their Eyes* Janie undertakes a journey "tuh find out about livin," which means to know about the nature and scope of the self, and to discover and uncover its possibilities. To a very large extent, the primary struggle in the novel centers on who should know for Janie. As Levecq states, the novel is about "Janie's epistemological status; in many ways the representation in the novel of Janie as a black woman is contingent on a question of knowledge" (92). Gender, race, and class are therefore central to the production and experience of knowledge in the novel. For example, when her classmates tell her, "Dat's you Alphabet, don't you know yo' ownself" (9), she learns her first lesson on knowing her racial difference. When Jody affirms, "Mah wife don't know nothin' about speech-makin'" (40), Janie realizes knowing and being and becoming a woman are not mutually exclusive as Jody suggests. Therefore, Janie's journey to self-construction revolves around one primary reason: society makes the assumptions that she cannot and should not know because she is a woman. Her first marriage illustrates this point precisely. Her grandmother believes that Janie should not "know" before marrying Logan. As Logan's wife, she realizes she "had had no chance to know things" (20). Her grandma's notion about knowing has been culturally conditioned to the point where she believes that "we don't know nothin' but what we see" (14), a view that conflicts with Janie's belief in seeing beyond seeing and its preference of vision as an enabling entity for self-construction. Moreover, Nanny's socialization stipulates, and allows her to believe, that "Ah don't know nothin' but what Ah'm told tuh do" (17), a view that also contradicts Janie's philosophy and its core belief about the place of voice in self-making. Nanny's cognitive dissonances (that the self cannot know anything but what it sees and is told to do) contravene Janie's views of the pos-

sibilities of voice and vision, the twin epistemological and ideological orientations in her notion of the self. In Nanny's worldview, vision and voice come from others, a standpoint that surrenders the determination of the self to others. Born in slavery, she had been socialized to accept the reasoning that "it wasn't for [her, and for any black woman for that matter] to fulfill [her] dreams of what a woman oughta to be and to do" (15). Nanny surrenders the idea of "to be" (the essence of self knowing) and "to do" (the basis of self-making) to others. These attempts to prevent Janie to know are also designs to render her voiceless. Jody's "big voice" (43) captures the totalizing language that silences her. In addition to preventing Janie from "speech-makin,'" Jody tells her to "shut up" (82), and she, therefore, "gradually ... pressed her teeth together and learned to hush" (67). She realizes in her first two marriages, though, that speaking is important for self-definition. Janie concludes that the self is discursively and linguistically constructed and mediated in language and culture. Language, therefore, has implications for power and dominance; it is also a liberating tool in self-formation. To a large extent then the novel is also a study of the relationship between language and self-formation (there is substantial scholarship on this subject, see, e.g., Hemenway; Wall; McCredie; Levecq; Wald; Raynaud).

Language is another cognitive paradigm in Janie's self-construction. According to Gates, for "Hurston, the search for a telling form of language ... defines the search for the self" (183), and Janie's growth to selfhood imitates "the phonetic, grammatical, and lexical structures of actual speech" (196). These elements are cognitive as well because they show how, for Janie, language is an intricate combination of self, voice, mind, and consciousness. Read this way, the novel explicates what cognitive linguistics and other functional theories of language refer to as language capacity, meaning the complex relationship of language, mind, brain, consciousness, and culture. Language capacity posits that language is both embodied and the product of social experiences. In addition, it reflects our cognitive ability to express language concepts as a dynamic process of growing new connections, neural, social and otherwise (on this, see, e.g., Langacker; Lakoff; Fanconnier; Baumgarter and Payr; Solso and Massaro; Gardner). The following words by the narrator are central to understanding language in the novel: "There is a basin in the mind where words float around on thought and thought on sound and sight. Then there is a depth of thought untouched by words, and deeper still a gulf of formless feelings untouched by thought" (23). This passage highlights cognitive schemas (mind, thought, and sight) that show language as a network of expressive (phonological and lexical, for example) and conceptual (sight, vision, and thought) systems. The excerpt also establishes the interlocking relationship of language and symbolic thought, language and unconscious and conscious experiences, language, mind, and culture. The passage acknowledges the "deep structure" of language as a system of perception, abstraction, and categorization, attributes that define the infinite capacity of human language. The latter claim runs counter to Rachel DuPlessis's use of the excerpt to frame her probing discussion of language in the novel. To her, the passage shows the "moment when language fails and formless unutterable feelings take over" (222). She further states that the passage highlights Hurston's language of the folk, in particular the way "folk language is conjured up in its relation to an impossible act of remembering *and* to the loss of a language of origin" (DuPlessis 223; emphasis in original). The passage affirms not so much when language fails or the loss of a language of origin; rather it suggests the capacities of human language not as a finite system but an infinite one that leads to possibilities and discovery. In the novel there is no loss of language; instead, as I argue below, there is the discovery of a new one, which Janie refers to as "maiden language." Janie's relationship to language, and the way she grows in it, is a vital point the novel makes. In fact, her philosophy of "tuh find about livin'" is a language-capacity adventure. As a young girl, she lacks the language to convey her complex feelings and thoughts. The novel begins with the suggestion of Janie as a baby who Nanny "talk[s]" (20) for. She realizes at one point that her first "husband had stopped talking rhymes to her" (25), intimating how he infantilizes her. Logan does not even allow her to own and use words (30). She leaves him and embarks on a journey to search for words. Not surprising, she sees her new life

with Jody as the beginning for the search for words. Sitting with him on the rig as they commence their journey, and the beginning of her second marriage, Janie reflects, "Her old thoughts were going to come in handy now, but *new words* would have to be made and said to fit them" (31; emphasis added). She acknowledges that self-fulfillment means possessing the capacity to discover new words and the way to connect ("fit") them into language.

She uses almost similar words after she realizes the silence that characterizes her marriage to Jody following her public humiliation of his masculinity: "So new thoughts had to be thought and new words said" (77). Janie also uses almost the same words to describe what Tea Cake means to her: "So in the beginnin' new thoughts had tuh be thought and new words said" (109). The emphasis on "new thoughts" and "new words" posits a crucial language-thought-mind-self-consciousness complex she uses to signal her development. Each new experience adds to the range of her language capacity. Language does not fail her nor is language a loss because it always has "new" possibilities that can lead to a new one. Janie tells Pheoby that with Tea Cake, "in the beginning new thoughts had tuh be thought and new words said ... He done taught me *de maiden language* all over" (109; emphasis added). She makes two crucial points here: first, that language is learned, a claim that is cognitively irrefutable; second, she posits maturational changes in language, where "maiden language" is distinguishable from the baby and rhyme talk that defined her beginning. Maiden language suggests a formulative and pragmatic language that incorporates her self, mind, voice, and consciousness. Maiden language is mediated and evaluated not only by vision and voice, verbal communication and symbolic thought, but also by reason and emotions, two vital attributes necessary for self-formation. The pear tree anchors this balance of reason and emotions and therefore symbolizes this maiden language from the start: "She knew things that nobody had ever told her. For instance the words of the trees" (25) and "she often spoke to falling seeds" (26). If the tree represents this balance, Tea Cake affirms it. From the start, Tea Cake looks to Janie "like the love thoughts of women" (101). With Tea Cake, Janie strives to stake a "space of a thought" (100). He leads her "to a whole lot of things she wanted to see and to know" (111). Unlike Jody and Logan, Tea Cake gives her the opportunity to know, think, see and speak. Tea Cake "done showed me where its de thought dat make de difference in ages. If people thinks de same they can make it [love] alright" (109). "Love thoughts" and "space of thought" combine cognitive-rational-emotive sensibilities that foreground the centrality of emotions in the cognitive changes in Janie's self-formation. Which means that emotions lead to cognitive change. Her experiences reveal how emotions are a conscious knowledge of planning and re-evaluations. Consciousness, as cognitive studies show, is both rational and emotional (see Singer and Salovey; Oatley.) But maiden language is also language as symbolic thought. According to Gates "figures of play" are the recurring tropes in the second half of the novel (194). The first encounter between Tea Cake and Janie takes place on play as language as symbolic thought. Tea Cake asks Janie: "How about playin' *you* some checkers? You looks hard tuh beat" (91, emphasis in original). Janie hesitates at the invitation, pointing out how she had been told she could not play checkers because she is a woman: "De men folks treasures de game round heah. Ah just aint never learnt how" (91). What follows next is crucial: "[Tea Cake] set it up and began to show her and she found herself glowing inside. Somebody wanted her to play. Somebody thought it natural for her to play" (91-92). She highlights once again the gendered nature of her society, which excludes women from playing. In addition to gender, class and race determine the way people play in this society. Early in her life Janie tells us that her schoolmates pushed her "'way from de ring plays and make out they couldn't play wid nobody dat lived on premises" (9).

An earlier occurrence of checkers in the novel locates the gendered perception of the game. In a conversation with Jody, Janie defends "womenfolk," disagreeing with the sexist claim that God made men "different" because they turn "out so smart" (70). When she states that men "don't know half as much as you think you do," Jody interrupts her saying, "you getting too moufy Janie ... Go fetch me de checker-board and de checkers" (70-71) so that he and the other men could play. In contrast, Tea

Cake teaches Janie to play. He says, "Ah'll come teach yuh again" because "you goin' tuh be uh good player too, after while" (92). Janie states: "Jody useter tell me Ah never would learn. It [checkers] wuz too heavy fuh mah brains"(92). Jody genders the game; Tea Cake, for his part, states that playing checkers has nothing to do with gender because "folks is playin' it wid sense and folks is playin' it without. But you got good meat on yo' head. You'll learn" (92). Janie and Tea Cake associate checkers with brain, sense, learning, and intelligence, thereby linking the game and cognition. In this sense, checkers is about cognition: knowing (what a position is), seeing (what a move to make), and thinking (what strategy to initiate). Is the game a metalinguistic activity in which we see the brain, mind, and sense at work? It is about learning and systematic thinking: Learning the rules of logical thinking through the systematic moves and steps of the game. Moves in checkers contain hypotheses, assumptions and inferences that embed intentionality and interpretation. Checkers is language as symbolic thought: the game, like all languages, is a code system Janie uses to encode and decode her sexist and gendered society; it is also, like all languages, an inferential system Janie uses to make inferences about her capabilities and emotions, consciousness and intelligence. Moreover, to play the game involves the interpretation of, and integration into, its rules and regulations. Play, as a metaphor of language as symbolic thought, allows for social learning. After they play the game of checkers, Tea Cake tells Janie, "You oughta be at the next game. Taint no use in *you* stayin' in heah if everybody else is gone. You don't buy from yo'self, do yuh?" (92). Tea Cake implies that the self can be realized only in interaction and participation. For this reason, he not only teaches Janie how to play checkers but to shoot, dance, sing, and tell stories. Janie tells Tea Cake, "But you come long way and made somethin' outta me. So Ah'm thankful fuh anythin' we come through together" (158). This is quite in contrast to what she tells Jody earlier in the novel that "somebody is bound tuh want tuh laugh and play" (98). Play, Janie suggests, develops intelligence, emotions, and social wellbeing. Play, therefore, has cognitive dimensions. Pearce, writes, "each and every form of play is an exercise in metaphoric symbolic thinking" (161) that enhances capacities for verbal, visual, and social interaction. In addition, Pearce opines that the cognitive capacities of play are evident in how storytelling and narration facilitate intelligence and consciousness. Checkers reflects Janie's developing consciousness and the empowering nature of that consciousness. The pear tree, which allows her to "play" with her imagination, enables that consciousness as well. In fact, the tree is an extended metaphor of storytelling, narrative, memory, and consciousness.

Ulric Neisser states that "consciousness undergoes changes throughout the course of life because we learn to pick up new information in new ways. These processes of change are called cognitive developments in some contexts, and perceptual learning in others; in political situations they have recently been called consciousness raising" (i). Neisser establishes connections between voice and consciousness and self-realization. Janie's cognitive development demonstrates Neisser's categories. For her part, Janie's self emerges through a consciousness that changes, evolves, and grows. But Janie enables Pheoby's growth in consciousness, a fact Pheoby acknowledges when she affirms: "Ah done growed ten feet higher from jus' listenin' tuh you, Janie. Ah ain't satisfied wid mahself no mo'" (182). In a sense Janie gives voice to Pheoby, who realizes the relationship between voice and consciousness and self. The debate about voice in the novel has focused on Janie's lack of voice (see Washington for a summary of this debate). Kaplan captures the thesis of the debate when she identifies "Janie's refusal to speak" (121), an observation that understands "speak" as only verbal, ideological and not epistemological. The question about voice that should be asked in this debate is this: How can Janie be said to lack voice in a novel that ends with her affirmation of maiden language? That is, how can Janie be voiceless at the moment she enters and claims language? A cognitive understanding of the self posits that the self speaks in multiple voices, among which is the verbal. Cognitive studies show also that the "study of the self ... concerns the structure of our inner lives" and voice, in this regard, includes the "inner dialogue the self engages in" (Lakoff and Johnson 267). Moreover, cognitive and psychological explanations suggest that "women's ways of knowing" involve a complex process

where "voice, mind, and self" are "intricately intertwined" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule 18). Thus, any consideration of voice is embedded in language capacity. Which means that voice is visually, verbally, and mentally mediated.

As I state earlier, Janie's "Maiden language" is an outcome of her language capacity, a re-articulation of what she refers to as voice and vision. Thus maiden language contains voices, not a singular voice, that allows her to speak on multiple levels. In this sense, Janie does speak. Moreover as the synonyms of "maiden" -- initiatory, inaugural, initiative, setting in motion, fresh, first -- suggest, Janie views language as an entity of possibilities and discovery where multiple voices are in play. Janie speaks in voices other than the verbal. As DuPlessis observes, "Any emphasis on voice either leaves out the repeated reference to 'pictures' and to 'crayon enlargements of life' or avoids analyzing their articulation" (226). Deborah Clark engages this point in her analyses of what she calls the novel's "seeing-voices" (608). She further states that Janie's "affirmation of her visual self" (608) "provides a model for reconciling voice and vision" (611). Clark highlights both the ideological and epistemological dimensions of the visual voice when she opines that the "construction of African American identity requires a voice that can make you see, a voice that celebrates the visible presence of black bodies" (600). Burrows affirms Clark's thesis, stating that for "Janie talking depends on looking" (435). "To hear is to see, the text proposes, because vision is never merely a question of just seeing; it is always a matter of metaphorical as well as literal sight" (Burrows 437). Clark and Burrows reiterate the novel's notion of seeing beyond seeing. Their insistence on the visual as voice shifts the voice debate to interesting directions. They suggest, for example, that the visual was one of the planes used to construct racial notions of African American selfhood. Janie's visual voice therefore reclaims that. But race was also about non-visual things, such as the "lack" of intelligence and intellect of black people. Janie's voice is not only about the verbal voice that speaks, or the visual voice that reclaims black bodies, but also a mental or inner one that redeems her intelligence and intellect. Thus, there are other dimensions of voice beyond the visual. As DuPlessis observes: "Hurston's 'mind-pictures' link the visual to thinking" (226), and in the "expressions 'mind-pictures' or 'thought-pictures,' the articulation of language foregrounds the visual and displays a concurrent expression of the verbal" (227). But this concurrence goes beyond the verbal and the visual; it incorporates a network of epistemological processes that involve the verbal, visual, and mental among others. In her journey "tuh find out about livin'", she hopes to discover "a jewel down inside herself" (85-86). And for this reason, she wants "to walk where people could see her and gleam it around" 85-86). This jewel is both an outward, visual voice as well as an inner, mental one "down inside herself." In fact, *Their Eyes* presents a theory and practice of the mind as voice. The novel demonstrates how the capacities of the mind, when prevented to think, can be suffocated and rendered voiceless. Janie tells Jody, "Mah own mind had tuh be squeezed and crowded out tuh make room for yours in me" (82). She uses the same metaphor when she tells Pheoby the effect Jody's store had on her: "Ah'd sit dere wid de walls creeping' up on me and squeezin' de life outa me" (107). Nanny also inhibits Janie's mental capacities: "Here Nanny had taken the biggest thing God ever made, the horizon ... and pinched it in to such a little bit of thing that she could tie it about her granddaughter's neck enough to choke her. She hated the old woman who had twisted her so in the name of love" (85). The horizon is a metaphor of the capacities and possibilities of the mind. This metaphor conceptualizes the mind as an abstract thing, but also in bodily terms. Therefore, "to choke" and to "twist" the "biggest thing," the horizon, implies stifling the mind. To Janie the mind, or its metaphor the horizon, is the collective aspects of her intellect and consciousness. It is the sum total of her mental powers, including how she understands, conceives, judges, reasons, thinks, wills, desires, and chooses. But the mind also anchors her memory and remembrance. By the mind, we understand how she thinks and speaks to herself and us.

In the final pages of the novel, Janie moves progressively into a cognitive space that is "full of thoughts" (182). The two words that dominate the novel's close are thinking and seeing, cognitive paradigms that further reinforce Janie's notion of "inside herself" and the capacities of the mind and

the inner voice. The last two paragraphs in the novel focus on these two words and their cognitive implications. The closing sentences in the novel's penultimate paragraph read: "She closed in [after Pheoby departs] and sat down. Combing and dusting road-dust out of her hair. *Thinking*" (183; emphasis added). The word *thinking* stands alone, and it reminds us of Janie's goal to become a thinking woman. Claiming thinking at the end, she comes full cycle because thinking is precisely where she had started "speaking" to tell her story: "She went back on thinking to her young years and explaining them to her friend," and "she thought for a while and decided her conscious life had commenced at Nanny's gate" (10). "Thinking" frames the beginning and the ending of her narrative. In this way, she demonstrates how thinking opens connections between her memory and mind, her past, present and future, and the experiences of language, body, mind, race, and gender they engender. The final sentence of the novel reads: "She called in her soul to come and see" (184), making vision the last word and voice in the novel. The word orients us to possibilities that equate self-knowledge with vision. To "see" in this context implies to "talk" or "speak," a view that affirms the truism of seeing as incipient speech. To Janie "see" represents the inward illumination of the spiritual, the inner voice that makes the conversation with the soul possible. Seeing and thinking, then, are examples of inner speech, a component of Janie's maiden language whose inner voice represents a dimension of her divided self. The novel foregrounds a "dramatic way of expressing a divided self. Janie's self ... is a divided self" (Gates 207). Gates's reading of *Their Eyes* as a "speakerly text" limits speak, or voice, to verbal speech that centers on what he calls the three "senses" of "'eyes' 'mouth', and 'ears'" (199). But understanding the divided self in the novel means first of all to understand how that self is negotiated from multiple voices.

Barbara Johnson's view that Janie's acquisition of "voice ... grows not out of her identity but out of her division into outside and inside" (212) addresses the multiple voices, and their ideological and epistemological import, in the novel. According to Johnson, the "female voice may be universally described as divided, but it must be recognized as divided in multitude of ways" (218). Johnson's view espouses feminist epistemology that takes into consideration the multiplicity and complexities of black women's experiences. This epistemology defines the outlook of Janie's constructed self where her objective and subjective experiences are mutually constitutive. For Janie voice is not absolute, but relative, contextual, embedded, and complex. Feminist epistemology and other modes of inquiry such as cognitive psychology continue to critique and question masculinist, positivist epistemology that valorizes objective knowledge and eschews subjective experiences. Furthermore, feminist epistemology does not insist, for example, on the absolute nature of knowledge characterized by impermeable categories of discrete and unrelated boundaries, but rather on the interrelated aspects of human experiences, where the paradigms of cognition are not divorced from the other cultural and public experiences. Thus voice as knowledge is embedded in voice as ideology. That is, in relation to voice in the novel, feminist epistemology would state, as Johnson rightly claims, that there are multiple ways of speaking that combine public and private, outer and inner, objective and subjective spaces, and to privilege one over the other would naturalize a hierarchization of social and gender (and race and class) relations (on this, see, e.g., Belenky et al, Doan, Kaschak). Although not writing from a cognitive point of view, and also not on the novel, Patricia Hill Collins in her discussion of the social construction of Black feminist thought implies that voice is not a unified discourse, but the multiple ways black women in particular negotiate their identities from the multi-dimensional experiences of race, sex, gender, and class. She opines that this epistemology comprises of the way African American women use "alternative ways of producing and validating knowledge itself" (183), and especially how they "value their own subjective knowledge base" (196). They do so by creating "knowledge that enables them to resist oppression" (190), resulting in an understanding of voice as a complex system of knowledge, consciousness, and empowerment. Feminist epistemology opens further possibilities to understand the relationship between self and voice in the novel (feminist readings of the novel abound: see, e.g., Jordan; DuPlessis). Barbara Christian observes that the trajectories of self-

definition of Black women have epistemological and ideological underpinnings. She highlights *Their Eyes*' "radical envisioning of the self as central and its use of language as a means of exploring the self as female and black" (175). She argues that the liberation of black women from sexism and racism is not fought wholly on voice as ideology, but on the epistemological level as well where "what Afro-American women have been permitted to express, in fact contemplate, as part of the self, is gravely affected by other complex issues" (175). In their writings African American women make a "commitment to an exploration of self, as central rather than marginal" (172). In doing so, they recognize that self-knowledge is "crucial if black women [are] to develop inner resources they would need to cope with largely social forces" (175). Janie's life story demonstrates that the struggles for black female empowerment are not fought on one unifying foundation of verbal voice. The complex facets of Janie's experiences speak in multiple, embedded voices that are private and public, subjective and objective. In *Their Eyes were Watching God*, Janie's cognitive capacities illuminate her self-construction. Her growth from a naïve girl to a mature woman operates on multiple, interrelated cognitive processes.

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