Cultural Determinism in "Their Eyes Were Watching God"

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CULTURAL DETERMINISM IN THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of English
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
Lynda Thompson
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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Lynda Ann Thompson

Approved, December 1994

Susan V. Donaldson, Chair

Colleen Kennedy

Peter Wiggins
DEDICATION

To my husband Tom Stubblefield; my father Bob Thompson; and my friend Jim Spurr, for their encouragement in this seemingly endless endeavor.
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the extent to which the characters in Their Eyes Were Watching God are determined by the dominant cultural values of the era in which Hurston places her novel, and to discuss how those values affect Janie Crawford's search for independence.

Critical assessment of the novel tends to concentrate on Janie as a character who escapes the bonds of male domination to become an independent woman. Although Janie does progress considerably as she grows from naive young girl to mature woman, her identity continues to depend upon the strictures imposed by patriarchal society. Her seeming liberation from the behavioral boundaries imposed by Logan and Joe is undermined by the discovery that Tea Cake also imposes boundaries which stem from his unconscious immersion in the values and stereotypes that dictate the repression of the female desire for independence.

Instead of the liberator envisioned by many critics, I contend that Tea Cake also dominates Janie— the difference is that he does so with her consent. Janie's compliance with Tea Cake's dictation of the terms of their relationship, as well as her acceptance of the violence that periodically erupts, strongly indicates her inability to break free of the cultural values that insist a woman find fulfillment within the confines of a romantic relationship. Janie's return to Eatonville, a town identified with her sterile, middle-class existence, suggests that Janie's rebellion against the status quo was only temporary. Within the novel's cultural milieu of 1937, Janie's freedom must be confined within the context of a male/female relationship based on patriarchal values.
CULTURAL DETERMINISM IN THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD
Zora Neale Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* has been interpreted as a chronicle of Janie Crawford's attempt to transcend traditional cultural values and establish herself as an independent woman. Janie's progress toward these goals is defined within the context of Hurston's depiction of Janie's relationships with her husbands through a lifetime of shared experience. Attempts to establish Janie as an early feminist character constitute a significant portion of critical commentary on the novel.

The gist of this commentary is exemplified in the comments of Alice Walker, Missy Dehn Kubitschek, Nellie McKay, and S. Jay Walker. Alice Walker says that Janie "refuses to allow society to dictate behavior to her, enjoys the love of a much younger, freedom loving man, and lives to tell others of her experience" (6). In "Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*: Black Novel of Sexism," S. Jay Walker claims that Janie is a subversive influence who will bring women's liberation to Eatonville. Kubitschek promotes Janie as a revelatory artist who will eventually re-assimilate with the community and force growth by her example, while McKay views her as emerging from "a male-identified woman to a self firmly grounded in a positive sense of independent black womanhood" (58).

I believe that these claims of feminist success are
exaggerated. While Janie is not the tragic mulatta often portrayed by earlier black novelists, neither is she the early feminist that many contemporary critics claim. I contend that Janie ultimately remains entangled within unseen cultural bonds represented by the patriarchal social milieu of Logan, Joe, and Tea Cake. Despite critics who maintain that Janie’s presumably egalitarian relationship with Tea Cake is evidence that Janie has slipped the bonds of culturally determined values, I maintain that this relationship is actually quite similar to her relationships with Logan and Joe. Although Zora Neale Hurston paved the way for future authors to devise autonomous female characters, Janie herself does not achieve independence.

Janie’s search for equality, love, and independence conflicts with the patriarchal values ingrained in Janie and her husbands by a lifetime’s teaching and observation. Among the most obvious of these influences is the promotion of distinct gender roles, initially cultivated by white society and then adopted by a significant portion of the black population. The early adoption of these gender roles by the black community is illustrated by the publication of the following list in an 1839 edition of Colored American and cited by James O. Horton in "Freedom’s Yoke: Gender Conventions Among Antebellum Free Blacks."

Man is strong—Woman is beautiful
Man is daring and confident—Woman is deferent and unassuming
Man is great in action—Woman in suffering
Man shines abroad—Woman at home
Man is a being of justice—Woman an angel of mercy

Horton notes that "Black newspapers were clear in their support of the place reserved for the female sex in American society" (56). Even in the antebellum period free black men fulfilled the role of protector and leader whenever possible, expecting "that with freedom would come the possibility that black people could form their lives to approximate gender conventions of American society at large" (Horton 55).

By the late nineteenth century many black leaders, most notably Booker T. Washington, were emphasizing the importance of material success in proving the black man's worth in society. As August Meier and Elliott Rudwick note in *From Plantation to Ghetto*,

Epitomizing these varied strands—accommodation, self-help, racial solidarity, acceptance of disfranchisement, economic accumulation and middle-class virtues, and industrial education—and doing more than anyone else to popularize this particular complex of ideas, was Booker T. Washington.... Washington declared his belief that the solution of the race problem would come through an application of the gospel of wealth.... Poor and ignorant as most of them were, blacks naturally alienated white people. They must, therefore, take the chief
responsibility for their own advancement.... He believed that economic accumulation and the cultivation of morality were the methods best calculated to raise the Negro's status in American society. (202-203)

The black press added its voice to that of Booker T. Washington, publishing articles that promoted the refutation of racial stereotypes by encouraging black men to be polite, well-dressed, sober, and hardworking, while women were exhorted to be discreet and simply dressed. Black women, like their white counterparts, were also charged with guardianship of the race's morality. They were expected to demand high morality, active industry, and frugality of men, yet to do so without demeaning their men's masculinity (Horton 58).

Promotion of nineteenth-century gender roles continued into the twentieth century. As Deborah S. David notes in The Forty-Nine Percent Majority: The Male Sex Role, men were encouraged to exude an aura of toughness, self-reliance, and aggression while avoiding such feminine traits as openness and vulnerability (David 12). Despite increasing encroachment of women into formerly masculine areas such as business and politics, the emphasis on differing gender roles continued to exert pressure on both sexes to behave within the prescribed boundaries of traditional sex roles.

The influence of popular notions of "correct" gender roles is evident in Their Eyes Were Watching God. In Logan and Joe, Hurston created characters who openly espoused the
continuation of bourgeois values. Even Tea Cake, portrayed as the lover who rejects these values in favor of freedom and fun, is not free of the cultural biases handed down by white patriarchal society. Janie is ultimately unable to achieve a truly equitable relationship with these men because she, like her husbands, is imprisoned by the traditional values unconsciously espoused by even the most liberal characters in Hurston's novel.

Although Janie's relationship with Tea Cake is apparently the most emotionally fulfilling, it is not "a relationship between acknowledged equals" (521), as S. Jay Walker claims. This marriage, like Janie's previous ones, is based on traditional dominant male and submissive female roles. Tea Cake dictates where and how they will live, while Janie submits to his authority, enduring poverty, hard work, and an occasional beating. A close reading of the novel reveals that their relationship is fundamentally far more similar to Janie's previous marriages than it is to the idyllic, equitable union envisioned by many critics.

Instead of illustrating increasingly egalitarian relationships, Janie's marriages to Joe and Tea Cake reaffirm the notion that "Part of the responsibility of black men was to 'act like a man,' and part of the responsibility of black women was to 'encourage and support the manhood of our men'" (Horton 70). For instance, Joe immediately assumes the masculine role by establishing himself as Janie's protector, buying her the best of everything but refusing to let her
speak publicly and effectively banning her from participation in any activity he deems unsuitable for the mayor's wife. Janie's silent acquiescence to Joe's treatment of her encourages him to continue his quest for small-town greatness by the subjugation of the community in general and Janie in particular. He is, in effect acting like a man while Janie, however reluctantly, provides public support of his actions. This pattern of womanly acquiescence is continued in Janie's marriage to Tea Cake. Her compliance with Tea Cake's every whim is calculated to make him feel like a man by placing him in complete control. His rescue of Janie from a mad dog makes explicit the couple's underlying commitment to traditional gender roles. Hurston has placed Janie in the position of a weak female rescued by the heroics of her lover. This position is reiterated by Tea Cake's proud declaration "Ah want yuh tuh know it's uh man heah" (Hurston 159).

Janie conforms to societal expectations of feminine behavior because these expectations are the only model she is given. She is incapable of transcending the influences of her husbands and her society because they are the only gauges by which she can measure her behavior. As Elizabeth Fox-Genovese points out in her prologue to Within the Plantation Household, To be a woman is to be a woman in relation to men. Just as societies have characteristic social relations, so they have characteristic gender relations. Societies have also tended to promote distinct roles for women and men. Those gender roles constitute
the activities through which women and men are encouraged to contribute to the collectivity and in which they are encouraged to find their identities—their deepest sense of who they are. Under stable social conditions, gender relations, gender roles, and gender identities tend to merge into a natural continuum. Under unstable or oppressive conditions, the continuum may be shattered. (29)

Janie's environment is unstable because there are no male/female relationships upon which she can base her idea of marriage. Mr. and Mrs. Washburn, Nanny's white employers, are too far removed for Janie to use as models, while both Nanny and Leafy are single parents. Consequently, Janie imaginatively creates a vision of marriage based on her observation of nature. This vision is best summed up in her conflation of marriage and the pear tree:

She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom, the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from root to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight. So this was a marriage! (Hurston 10-11)

Janie's vision of marriage as the source of romance, poetry, and sexual fulfillment is pretty, but it fails to take into account the expectations of a society that places a premium on material success rather than emotional fulfillment. This expectation is reflected in Nanny's decision that Janie
must marry Logan Killicks, an older, well-to-do farmer. As Nellie McKay points out in "Zora Neale Hurston’s Their Eyes Were Watching God as Autobiography," Nanny encircles Janie with a love that ushers her into the prisonhouse of the male-identified woman, a condition that confines women from their own lives. Nanny’s justification of the young girl’s marriage to the aging but financially secure Logan Killicks for safety and protection from other men condones the patriarchal oppression of women. (59)

Nanny overrides Janie’s protests by telling her: "You ain’t got nobody but me.... Neither can you stand alone by yoself" (Hurston 15). She reiterates the hazards of trying to stand alone by telling Janie of her own experience as a young slave victimized by her white master and his vindictive wife. Nanny’s position is very similar to that described by Hazel V. Carby in Reconstructing Womanhood: "The slave woman, as victim became defined in terms of a physical exploitation resulting from the lack of the assets of white womanhood: no masculine protector or home and family, the locus of the flowering of white womanhood" (35). Although Nanny eventually finds congenial employment and a degree of security with the Washburn family, she and Leafy are still without the protection of a husband and father. Leafy’s rape by her teacher reinforces, at least in Nanny’s mind, the precarious position of poor, single, black women. Nanny’s experience has taught her that "De nigger woman is de mule uh de world" (Hurston 14)
and that a woman alone is at the mercy of a male dominated society.

In Nanny's mind, security can be found only in marriage, preferably to a man of relatively high status. As Claudia Tate says,

> Inasmuch as black female desire for freedom is doubly prohibited in a white patriarchal society, Nanny substitutes social (e.g., financial) security for that prohibition. In her estimation, marriage to a well-to-do black man is protection for a black woman. (99)

Unlike Johnny Taylor, who momentarily embodies Janie's vision of love, Logan is able to provide for Janie and to protect her from the poverty and degradation suffered by Nanny and Leafy.

Nanny's efforts to spare Janie the hardships that she and Leafy encountered are rooted in the belief that women are incapable of caring for themselves. This belief colors even Nanny's most positive actions. For instance, Nanny's attempt to give Janie an education is aimed at enabling her to "pick from a higher bush and a sweeter berry" (Hurston 13) rather than from a desire to provide Janie with the skills to live independently. Likewise, Nanny's claim that she wants Janie to "preach a great sermon about colored women sittin' on high" (Hurston 15) and to "take a stand on high ground" (Hurston 16) initially seems to indicate a desire to empower black women. These words, however, are contradicted by her insistence on Janie's early marriage to a man who will provide position and
security in exchange for a young, beautiful wife. Nanny's fears that Janie will be "used for a work-ox and a brood-sow" (Hurston 15), as she was, lead her to impose upon Janie marriage to a "decent" man, no matter how repulsive Janie finds him. The idea of marrying for love or of achieving high ground without male protection does not coincide with Nanny's experience of the world.

Although Nanny tells Janie "youse uh 'oman, now" (Hurston 12), she treats her as a child and Janie reacts as one. During their confrontation over Logan, Janie hunches over and pouts at the floor like a thwarted child, while Nanny first slaps and then rocks Janie "like an infant" (Hurston 16) soothing her and calling her "baby" (Hurston 14). Janie's obedience to Nanny's wishes is based on her perception of herself as a dependent child rather than on agreement with Nanny's beliefs. Although Janie dislikes Nanny's decision, she is unable to disobey the authority that Nanny represents.

Janie's perception of herself as a child is reinforced throughout the novel by other characters' references to her. Logan calls Janie "LilBit" (Hurston 25), while Joe asks "who's lookin' after a lil girl-chile lak you" (Hurston 27). Even when Janie is forty years old, she is still identified as "uh lil girl baby all de time" (Hurston 172) by Tea Cake, while teen-aged Hezekiah treats her like a baby sister "as if to say, 'You poor little thing, give it to big brother.'" (Hurston 88). These repeated references to Janie as a little girl reinforce the pattern of deference and dependence
established in childhood.

Janie's marriage to Logan is a direct result of her position as a child, dependent upon adults who impose their desires and values upon her. Both Nanny and Logan are far more concerned with their own visions of success than they are with Janie's needs. Nanny's primary criterion for a good marriage is material success. Nanny's priorities are evident when she tells Janie, "If you don't want him [Logan] you sho oughta. Heah you is wid de onliest organ in town, amongst colored folks, in yo' parlor. Got a house bought and paid for and sixty acres uh land right on de big road" (Hurston 22). Logan is the epitome of success in the eyes of Nanny and the community. As Donald Marks says, "Killicks is an acceptable husband not because Janie is in love with him, but because he is landed and financially sound and has begun to acquire possessions which are somewhat technologically sophisticated" (153). He is in a position both to protect Janie and to provide her with the status that Nanny was never able to achieve. Janie's youthful obsession with poetry and pretty talk has no place in the social system from which Nanny operates.

It is primarily Logan's status as a land owner that grants him the prominence accorded him by Nanny. As V. P. Franklin says in Black Self-Determination,

Within the free black communities of the antebellum North and South, there was a noticeable preoccupation with the acquisition of property, for it was
through ownership of land that one demonstrated one's fitness for participation in the "body politic." (125)

The continued importance of land ownership in the community is reflected in the other black children's taunting of Janie for living on the Washburns' property. Their derision prompts Nanny's struggle to buy a bit of land so Janie "wouldn't have to stay in de white folks' yard" (Hurston 19). Nanny's desire for Janie to escape the white man's yard altogether is a major factor in her insistence that Janie marry Logan. Marriage to a respectable man is the only protection Nanny can envision and she eagerly grasps that protection for her granddaughter.

Logan's ability to protect Janie is "reflected in the success and respect that came to him through hard work, ownership of property, and possession of a young and pretty wife" (McKay 60). By his own standards, as well as by those of his community, Logan is a successful man, a good provider, and an indulgent husband since he does not abuse Janie and even carries water and chops wood for her. As a product of traditional values, Logan obviously believes that his provision of financial and social security should produce feelings of gratitude and respect if not love.

Janie's continuing dislike of Logan, as well as her refusal to assist with the farm, leads to mounting irritation and confusion on Logan's part. Although Janie's silence regarding his decision to buy a second mule "'all gentled up so even uh woman kin handle 'im'" (Hurston 26) momentarily
gives Logan hope that Janie will capitulate and become a docile wife, he is soon disillusioned. Janie’s question as to what he would do if she left all but destroys his hopes of making Janie a willing partner in the farm work. Instead, her question "put words in his held-in fears. She might run off sure enough" (Hurston 29).

Logan, however, refuses to admit these fears. He heads off any intimate discussion by telling Janie, "Youse powerful independent around here sometime considerin’.... youse born in a carriage ‘thout no top to it and yo’ mama and you bein’ born and raised in de white folks back-yard" (Hurston 29). The implication that their marital problems are strictly a result of Janie’s spoiled ways and her lower-class, illegitimate background is indicative of Logan’s reluctance to admit to his fears. The repression of "unmanly" emotions has been so strongly inculcated that, even when confronted with losing Janie, Logan is unable to overcome the injunction of emotional restraint. The thought of Janie’s leaving "put a terrible ache in Logan’s body, but he thought it best to put on scorn" (Hurston 29). Instead of telling Janie that he cares for her, Logan tries to "hurt her as she had hurt him" (Hurston 29). The next morning, Logan continues to substitute scorn and anger for his true feelings. He tells Janie:

"Ah just as good as take you out de white folks’ kitchen and set you down on yo’ royal diasticutis and you take and low-rate me! Ah’l1 take holt uh dat ax and come in dere and kill yuh.... Ah’m too
honest and hard-workin’ for anybody in yo’ family, 
dat’s de reason you don’t want me!” (Hurston 30)
The ache Logan felt and the description of his words as "half a sob and half a cry" (Hurston 30) imply that Logan cares for Janie and wants her to care for him. Logan, however, stifles these emotions. His concept of manliness will not allow him to consider, much less to display, feelings of hurt or tenderness. As Peter Schwenger says in "The Masculine Mode" "one of the most powerful archetypes of manhood is the idea that the real man is the one who acts, rather than the one who contemplates. The real man thinks of practical matters rather than abstract ones and certainly does not brood upon himself or the nature of his sexuality" (110). Unable to express his love for Janie and his fear of losing her, Logan disguises these "feminine" feelings by displaying contempt for Janie and her refusal to appreciate and love him. By concealing his pain under a mask of indifference and superiority, Logan can retain his masculine self-image.

Janie’s renunciation of this marriage is the result of several variables. Logan’s continuing insistence that Janie participate in the farmwork kindles her fear of becoming the mule of which Nanny spoke, while his failure to maintain a semblance of romantic love further alienates his young wife. Although Logan’s flaws are partially to blame for Janie’s repudiation of their marriage, Janie’s immaturity is a major factor in the break-up. She insists that Logan was never meant to be loved
"'Cause Ah hates de way his head is so long one way and so flat on de sides and dat pone uh fat back uh his neck.... His belly is too big too, now, and his toe-nails look lak mule foots. And tain't nothin' in de way of him washin' his feet every evenin' before he comes tuh bed.... He don't even never mention nothin' pretty" (Hurston 23).

The young Janie values pretty words and a handsome figure more than Logan's property and social status. When he stops talking in rhymes and caressing her hair, she decides that all hope of love is over.

In leaving Logan, Janie takes the first step in her search for independence. It is important to note, however, that Joe's invitation to run away with him is the primary impetus for Janie's decision. Dazzled by Joe's stylish appearance and smooth, confident talk, Janie elopes with him even though she admits to herself that he does not "represent sun up and pollen and blooming trees, but ...far horizon... and chance" (Hurston 28). Janie's rebellion is not an indication of growing confidence in her ability to stand on her own, but a transference of dependence from one man to another. Joe provides a safety net, as well as a second chance to create a marriage based on her vision of the pear tree.

Despite her acknowledgement that Joe does not embody her fantasy lover, Janie silently determines that "from now on until death she was going to have flower dust and springtime
sprinkled over everything" (Hurston 31). Janie's determination to have a marriage that resembles the flowering pear tree even though her new husband is obviously more concerned with power and prestige than with poetry and sensuality sets the stage for her eventual disillusionment. Joe, like Logan, is incapable of living up to Janie's ideal because he is determined to succeed within the confines of a white capitalist society. Janie's desire to divest herself of Logan, combined with the attractive, outgoing personality of Joe, blinds her to Joe's basic character.

As Susan Willis says in her book *Specifying*, "Joe Starks represents the nascient black bourgeoisie, hell-bent for progress and ready to beat white society at its own game" (47). Joe has "been workin' for white folks all his life" (Hurston 27) and has been strongly influenced by the patriarchal values they embodied. Joe's observation of successful white men has shaped his vision of success. His aggressive leadership, his desire for material goods, and his need to dominate both his wife and his community are all reflections of the middle-class values he has seen in the white world. His decision to go to Eatonville is prompted by his recognition that "white folks had all de sayso where he come from and everywhere else, exceptin' dis place dat colored folks was buildin' theirselves" (Hurston 27). By arriving early and buying in big, Joe can achieve his desire for power, wealth, and prestige analogous to that of white middle-class men. It has "always been his wish and desire to be a big voice"
(Hurston 27), and upon his arrival in Eatonville Joe proceeds to establish himself as the town leader. He gets himself elected mayor, then sets himself up as storekeeper, postmaster, and landowner.

Secure in his position as Eatonville's most prominent citizen, Joe turns his attention to acquiring tangible evidence of his success. Peter Filene, in *Him/Her/Self*, notes that success in the early twentieth century "was defined, without apology or dismay as wealth" (141) and Joe accepts this definition. He is the epitome of the black bourgeois who emulates the white middle-class traditions of hard work and thrift in order to attain social position and security. He represents the segment of black society that believes economic success is the key to overcoming prejudice against blacks. Meier and Rudwick identify this portion of the black population as believing that

self-help and racial solidarity were still combined with an economic ideology that preached the acquisition of middle-class virtues and black support of black business.... if Negroes acquired wealth and middle-class respectability the race would thus earn acceptance from whites and the walls of prejudice would crumble. (195)

Although Joe is seemingly unconcerned with earning acceptance from whites, he is eager to achieve a status equal to that of his former white employers. To do this, Joe's success must "be translated into visible and socially
acceptable symbols—money, possessions, power" (David 90). The importance of possessions within the bourgeois value system is summed up by Joe Dubbert in *A Man’s Place*:

A man’s status could be determined by what he could acquire and control in a lifetime. It could be material goods, land, or even people. Such a frame of reference stressed individualism and personal accomplishment, and did not invite a consideration of the needs of others. To have done so would have signaled sentimentality, a symptom of weakness that manly men avoided. (15)

Joe’s obsession with demonstrating his status in the community leads him to acquire possessions that resemble those of white people. He builds a white two-story house that makes the other homes look like servants’ quarters surrounding the "'big house’" (Hurston 44). Joe buys a big desk and chair just like the ones owned by powerful white men in Maitland. Even his spittoon is a status symbol—a "gold-looking vase that anybody else would have been glad to put on their front-room table" (Hurston 44).

Joe’s acquisitions arouse the respect and admiration of the townspeople, even though they complain about Joe’s "uppity" ways. Sam Watson recognizes that Joe brought progress to Eatonville and observes "De town wouldn’t be nothin’ if it wasn’t for him" (Hurston 46). The obedience of the community, however reluctant, encourages Joe in his decision to emulate the patriarchal values he observed in
white society.

The town had a basketful of feelings good and bad about Joe’s positions and possessions but none had the temerity to challenge him. They bowed down to him rather, because he was all of these things, and then again he was all of these things because the town bowed down. (Hurston 47)

Joe’s position as mayor and his wealth are enough to establish him at the top of Eatonville’s social ladder. His marriage to Janie, a beautiful young mulatta, simply enhances Joe’s position. Hazel Carby notes in *Reconstructing Womanhood* that "woman as ornament was a social sign of achieved wealth" (25), and the men of Eatonville recognize Joe’s superiority in his possession of Janie. Coker acknowledges this superiority when consoling Hicks for his failure to impress Janie. As Coker tells Hicks, "It takes money tuh feed pretty women" (Hurston 34) and "A whole heap uh men seen de same thing you seen but they got better sense than you. You oughta know you can’t take no ‘oman lak dat from no man lak him" (Hurston 36). Coker’s response illustrates Deborah S. David’s assertion in *The Forty-Nine Percent Majority*: "the best man can acquire the most desirable woman, and maintain her as one of his possessions" (David 90). Joe’s use of Janie as a showpiece is yet another example of his compulsion to possess all the trappings of the successful white man.

That Joe looks upon Janie as an indication of his own status is evident throughout their marriage. He tells her to
dress up for their first town meeting since "Everybody was coming sort of fixed up, and he didn’t mean for nobody else’s wife to rank with her. She must look on herself as the bell-cow, the other women were the gang" (Hurston 39). Joe expects Janie to "dress in a decorous fashion...wait on customers in the store...not speak out of turn [or] offer an opinion of join in any rowdy behavior like playing checkers or telling tales" (Willis 47). These expectations are indicative of Joe’s desire that Janie emulate the standards of behavior he has observed in white middle-class women.

Janie’s compliance with Joe’s desires and expectations provides strong evidence that she has not made significant progress from her position as a young girl who instinctively obeys authority even when she disagrees. She quietly accepts Joe’s refusal to let her speak at the first town meeting, making "her face laugh" (Hurston 41) even though his actions troubled her. In subsequent disagreements Janie takes "the easy way away from a fuss. She didn’t change her mind but she agreed with her mouth" (Hurston 59). Even when Joe, jealous of his friends’ admiring glances at Janie, insists that she wear a head-rag in the store, she never complains. Although inwardly fuming, she obediently ties up her hair. "No matter what Jody did, she said nothing. She had learned how to talk some and leave some. She was a rut in the road. Plenty of life beneath the surface but it was kept beaten down by the wheels" (Hurston 72). At least outwardly, Janie is still very much the obedient, submissive wife who bows to her husband’s
authority.

Although Janie does develop an imaginative inner life in response to her disappointment, she does not voice her new-found hopes and beliefs, nor does her behavior change. Janie's inner life has no effect on her outer life or on her response to those around her. Janie makes little effort to effect change in her relationship with Joe. Instead, she deliberately represses her new-found awareness: "Maybe he ain't nothin'...but he is something in my mouth. He's got tuh be else Ah ain't got nothin' tuh live for. Ah'll lie and say he is. If Ah don't, life won't be nothin' but uh store and uh house" (Hurston 72). Janie's conscious repression of her thoughts and feelings signifies the extent of her complicity in maintaining the facade of a successful relationship and further encourages the town's envy of her position as Mrs. Mayor Starks.

Like Janie, Joe refuses to admit to feelings with which he is uncomfortable. He is particularly reluctant to express any emotion that might be construed as feminine. For example, his insistence that Janie keep her hair covered in the store stems from jealousy. However, Joe "never told Janie how jealous he was. He never told her how often he had seen the other men figuratively wallowing in it [Janie's hair] as she went about things in the store.... But he never said things like that. It just wasn't in him" (Hurston 51-52).

Even when Joe notices his physical deterioration, he cannot share his fears with Janie. He subscribes to the
assumption, discussed in *American Tough*, that "physical vigor supports mental vigor" (Wilkinson 12). Physical vigor is an important component of his masculine image, and Janie herself initially takes pride in Joe’s energy and portly good looks. The town also recognizes a vitality about Joe that gives him "'uh throne in de seat of his pants’" (Hurston 46) and a "bowdown command in his face" (Hurston 44). The realization that he is growing old triggers Joe’s fear that with age will come loss of respect. Although it is acceptable "to be a mature man of youthful vigor" (Wilkinson 91), admission of physical limitations can relegate a man to the sidelines. Joe’s position as Eatonville’s most prominent citizen is rooted in his vigorous leadership. His fear that he will lose status if the town notices his age and illness compels him to displace his fears by jeering at Janie’s age and appearance.

The more his back ached and his muscles dissolved into fat and the fat melted off his bones, the more fractious he became with Janie. Especially in the store. The more people in there the more ridicule he poured over her body to point attention away from his own. (Hurston 73-74)

In spite of Joe’s public ridicule, Janie continues her established pattern of submission. Only when goaded beyond endurance with Joe’s increasingly derogatory comments does Janie break her silence, retorting: "When you pull down yo’ britches, you look lak de change uh life" (Hurston 75).

With this remark, Janie figuratively castrates Joe,
publicly robbing him of his manhood. Joe has lost his illusion of irresistible maleness that all men cherish.... When he paraded his possessions hereafter, they would not consider the two together. They'd look with envy at the things and pity the man that owned them.... For what can excuse a man in the eyes of other men for lack of strength? (Hurston 75-76)

Janie's public derision of Joe's manhood hastens his demise. As the editors of *The Forty-Nine Percent Majority* observe, "when a big man loses to a smaller man, or appears to have no 'guts' in the crunch, he becomes an object of scorn, the butt of innumerable jokes and stories" (26). Joe has not merely lost a fist fight to a smaller man; he had been humiliated by a woman whom the town assumed he had under his control. Joe will no longer be able to claim the respect of his fellow citizens because he has lost both his masculine self-image and his dominance over his wife—two traits demanded by the concept of masculinity to which Joe subscribes.

This incident is significant not only because it is one of the first instances of Janie's public rebellion but because of Joe's reaction. As discussed earlier, Joe is incapable of expressing feelings that might undermine his masculinity. His insulting remarks to Janie stem largely from fears he cannot acknowledge. When Janie finally forces him to confront his own deterioration, his reaction is to strike her. The fear and loss that he feels cannot be put into words without
emasculating himself even further. Anger is the only acceptable way for Joe to deal with a "moufy" woman like Janie and still retain any semblance of masculinity.

The "dozens" scene precipitates Joe's decline and leads to the couple's final confrontation. Janie breaks years of silence when, in her last conversation with Joe, she refuses to allow him to coerce her into silence.

"Listen, Jody, you ain't de Jody ah run off down de road wid. You'se whut's left after he died. Ah run off tuh keep house wid you in uh wonderful way. But you wasn't satisfied wid me de way Ah was. Naw! Mah own mind had tuh be squeezed and crowded out tuh make room for yours in me.... And now you got tuh die tuh find out dat you got tuh pacify somebody besides yo'self if you wants any love and any sympathy in dis world." (Hurston 82)

Janie's insistence on speaking in spite of Joe's objections intimates a change from the woman who had earlier "pressed her teeth together and learned to hush" when faced with opposition (Hurston 67). By forcing Joe to listen to her story of their marriage, Janie demands recognition as a person in her own right and not simply as a reflection of Joe's success. She has found the courage to stand up to Joe, and the articulation of her hidden thoughts is an important step in her journey toward independence.

With Joe's death, Hurston has prepared the way for Janie to make her journey to the horizon in search of people, inde-
pendence, and new gender roles. Hurston has placed Janie in an ideal situation in which all familial obligations have been removed and financial independence has been established. Janie, however, "saw no reason to rush at changing things around. She would have the rest of her life to do as she pleased" (Hurston 85). Even though she now sits on the porch with the story tellers, Janie only listens; she does not participate. That Janie now wears her hair "in one thick braid swinging well below her waist.... was the only change people saw in her" (Hurston 85). There is no sense of urgency to create a life that is significantly different from the one that Joe created for her. Janie’s apparent contentment with the status quo undermines her supposed eagerness to establish herself as an independent woman.

Hurston’s concentration, in the interval between Joe’s death and Tea Cake’s arrival, on Janie’s intimidation when confronted with responsibility further weakens critical assertions that "Their Eyes is a bold feminist novel" (Gates 187). Although thrilled with the idea of freedom, Janie is daunted by the actual responsibilities of supervising the store and collecting tenants’ rents. After twenty years of working in the store, Janie has made little progress from her initial response to Joe’s insistence that she look after things: "Oh Jody, Ah can’t do nothin’ wid no store lessen youse there. Ah could maybe come in and help you when things git rushed, but--" (Hurston 41). Janie has apparently never been able to overcome her confusion when confronted with "a
mathematical dilemma" (Hurston 51) in the store, and she cannot shake the feeling that Joe will "come in and find something wrong that she had done" (Hurston 87). Instead of working to overcome these feelings, Janie simply turns over the duties of rent collection and store supervision to seventeen-year-old Hezekiah. Unlike Janie, Hezekiah is eager to try on his new authority, imitating Joe's speech and mannerisms and treating Janie more like a baby sister than an employer. Janie's statement that she "wouldn't know what to do without him" (Hurston 88) is literally true. She needs Hezekiah to perform the "male" duties that Joe had always performed. She overlooks Hezekiah's petty theft of jaw-breakers and sen-sen because he protects her from the unpleasant aspects of her new position as sole owner of the store and rental property. Janie enjoys the freedom of her position as a well-to-do widow but refuses to assume the responsibilities that are entailed. By depending on Hezekiah to perform the duties she does not like or with which she is uncomfortable, Janie prevents herself from developing full control over her life. Although her eventual insistence on speaking her mind to Joe and her presence among the storytellers on the porch are signs that Janie has grown, that growth is offset by Janie's apparent contentment with the status quo of her life in Eatonville and her reliance on Hezekiah to run things for her.

Janie's neighbors encourage her dependence, urging her to find a man to take care of her after Joe's death. Although
Janie is financially well off, the town cannot accept the possibility of female independence. Ike Green, in his thinly disguised courting, tells Janie, "Womenfolks is easy taken advantage of.... Whut yuh needs is uh man dat yuh done lived uhround and know all about tuh sort of manage yo' things fuh yuh and generally do round" (Hurston 87). Other potential suitors claim: "Uh woman by herself is uh pitiful thing.... Dey needs aid and assistance. God never meant 'em tuh try tuh stand by theirselves. You ain’t been used tuh knockin’ round and doin’ fuh yo’self, Ms’ Starks. You been well taken keer of, you needs uh man" (Hurston 86). Even Pheoby, who acknowledges that Janie is her "own woman" (Hurston 108), says in the same breath: "Ah’d feel uh whole heap better ’bout yuh if you wuz marryin’ dat man up dere in Sanford" (Hurston 108).

The views expressed by these characters reflect the mindset that "facilitates females being emotionally, physically, psychologically, and in other ways dependent on men and ...result[s] in males behaving toward women in so-called protective, condescending and generally patriarchal ways" (C. Franklin 164). Janie's relationships with Logan and Joe are based primarily on this kind of thinking, and the town apparently finds nothing remarkable in this attitude. Instead, they find Janie's rejection of "acceptable" suitors disconcerting.

Although Janie claims to love her freedom, its lustre appears to fade rapidly. Before a year is out, Janie concedes to herself that "It might be nice to marry him [the Sanford
undertaker], at that" (Hurston 88-89). Janie’s contemplation of marriage to a man whose middle-class status so completely mirrors that of Joe indicates that Janie is unable to break free of the belief that her life is incomplete without a man—even if he is the antithesis of her pear tree image.

Marriage to the undertaker offers yet another traditional relationship—one of which the Eatonville community can approve because the suitor is the social and economic equal of Janie. However, Tea Cake’s arrival quickly banishes thoughts of the undertaker. Although in the town’s eyes Tea Cake is an unfit companion for Janie due to social, economic, and age differences, his physical attractiveness is too strong for Janie to deny. This attraction is evident as Janie "looked him over and got little thrills from every one of his good points. Those full, lazy eyes with the lashes curling sharply away like drawn scimitars. The lean, over-padded shoulders and narrow waist" (Hurston 92).

Although Hurston obviously intends Tea Cake as the antithesis of the undertaker, the fact that Janie must choose either man is problematic if she is to be seen as a woman striding toward independence and autonomy. Instead of allowing Janie to confront and overcome obstacles and doubts on her own, Hurston introduces Tea Cake to help Janie achieve a degree of independence within the confines of a male/female relationship. It is Tea Cake who provides the impetus for Janie’s rebellion against the community’s values, just as Joe’s arrival created the opportunity for her rebellion
Janie's retreat into the role of weak female is signaled by her claim that closing the store "is kinda strainin' fuh me" (Hurston 94). As their relationship continues, Janie retreats even further from independence by allowing herself to be relegated to the role of a child. After calling him "Tea Cake" for the first time, Janie looks for Tea Cake's approval and is rewarded by his reply: "Jes lak uh lil girl wid her Easter dress on" (Hurston 94). Tea Cake's preferences even dictate Janie's wardrobe. She wears blue because Tea Cake likes it, and she even allows him to choose her wedding outfit: "High heel slippers, necklace, earrings, everything he wants tuh see me in" (Hurston 110). Janie readily relinquishes the freedom she claimed to enjoy in favor of marriage to an attractive young man reminiscent of Johnny Taylor. As S. Jay Walker notes,

Janie's search for people can only be accomplished through a person, a man. In this sense of an individual, personal love, Hurston returns, in effect to the romantic tradition of reciprocal passion...and it is in terms of that tradition that finally she views the relationship between Tea Cake and Janie. (526)

Tea Cake is offered as an alternative to the values represented by Logan and Joe. While these men embody the bourgeois values of white society, Tea Cake more closely resembles the African tradition described by Eugene Genovese
in *Roll, Jordan, Roll*. This tradition stressed hard work but discounted the value of steady, routine work as a moral imperative. Work was a means by which one earned money to have fun, not an end in itself (311). Tea Cake’s love of play, his gambling, and his sporadic work habits emphasize the gulf between him and Janie’s previous husbands. Having explored, and rejected, relationships based on white middle-class values, Hurston turns her attention to an exploration of the possibilities of a marriage based on sensuality and play. To this end, she introduces Tea Cake, who looks like "the love thoughts of women" (Hurston 101).

The sexual attraction Janie feels is augmented by Tea Cake’s treatment of her. Unlike Joe and Logan, Tea Cake "thought it natural for her to play" (Hurston 92). He teaches her to drive, to shoot, and to play checkers. He encourages her to express herself and to dress in ways that enhance her beauty. Tea Cake’s free and easy attitude complements Janie’s desire for freedom. His sense of his own self worth is so great that it seems he cannot help aiding Janie in her struggle to reach her full potential. At this point in the narrative Janie’s relationship with Tea Cake looks like the ideal that many critics describe.

Missy Dehn Kubitschek represents the body of criticism viewing the marriage of Tea Cake and Janie as ideal in her claim that "their relationship rejects ordinary conceptions of dominant and subordinate sex roles. Tea Cake is Janie’s companion on her quest, not her master or mentor" (111). S.
Jay Walker describes the relationship between Janie and Tea Cake as growing neither out of need nor greed but simply of the desire of Janie and Tea Cake to be together, to share all their experiences. There is no longer the "youse in yo' place and Ah'm in mine" because there are no longer separate places, and it is that blurring of "places," essentially the blurring of sex-role stereotypes within an intensely sexual relationship, that constitutes the liberation and happiness of Janie Killicks Starks Woods. (526-527)

These critics' contention that Janie and Tea Cake transcend traditional sex roles is clearly contradicted by the interaction between the couple. While Janie now plays checkers, drives, and tells stories, she also submits to Tea Cake's decisions as to whether or not she will work, where they will live, and with whom she will associate. The blurring of sex roles praised by Kubitschek is primarily superficial. The basic underpinnings of this relationship are still those of traditional society.

Critics' acceptance of Janie's idealized version of her third marriage overlooks the fact that "Tea Cake, like Logan and Jody before him, needs to feel superior to—not equal with—his woman. Moreover, they ignore what Janie herself accepts, that she was "'start[ing] all over in Tea Cake's way' (Hurston 171), and not her own" (Ferguson 193). Tea Cake may love Janie, but he still views her as his property to beat or
coddle as suits his whim. Tea Cake’s need for dominance manifests itself most directly in his statement "you’se mah wife and mah woman" (Hurston 119). This sentiment is repeated in one form or another throughout their relationship. For instance, on the muck Tea Cake boasts, "Janie is wherever Ah wants tuh be" (Hurston 141), a statement that suspiciously resembles Logan’s earlier claim that Janie’s place is "wherever Ah need yuh" (Hurston 30).

Tea Cake’s need for superiority is also exhibited in his insistence on financial control of the relationship. Although, as Donald Marks points out, Tea Cake does not value "accumulating property and distinguishing himself from the remainder of society" (155), he has internalized the traditional idea that a man must be able to support his wife. After his initial "borrowing" of Janie’s two hundred dollars, Tea Cake insists that he does not need "assistance tuh help me feed mah woman.... you gointuh eat whutever mah money can buy yuh and wear de same" (Hurston 122). Tea Cake’s determination not to live off his wife’s money denotes his need to prove that he is the equal of her previous husbands. Tea Cake cannot be equal to Logan and Joe, nor can he be superior to Janie if he uses her money to help support her.

Even Tea Cake’s desire for Janie to work with him in the fields is tinged with concern that he may appear to be shirking his duties as provider. He queries, "You don’t think Ah’m tryin’ tuh git outa takin’ keer uh yuh, do yuh, Janie, ’cause Ah ast yuh tuh work long side uh me" (Hurston 127).
Despite his unconventional lifestyle, praised by Donald Marks as a subversion of capitalist society, Tea Cake still exhibits the traditional masculine desire for dominance in the need to support "his" woman.

Tea Cake also sees Janie as a status symbol, just as Logan and Joe did. He relishes the admiration displayed by Sop-de-Bottom when the latter says:

you sho is a lucky man.... Uh person can see every place you hit her. Ah bet she never raised her hand tuh hit yuh back, neither. Take some uh dese ol’ rusty black women and dey would fight yuh all night long and next day nobody couldn’t tell you ever hit ‘m.... wouldn’t Ah love tuh whip uh tender woman lak Janie! (Hurston 140-141)

Janie’s light skin and submissive behavior elevate the impoverished, dark-skinned Tea Cake’s status in the community. He boasts, "Mah Janie is uh high time woman and useter things. Ah didn’t git her outa de middle uh de road. Ah got her outa uh big fine house. Right now she got money enough in de bank tuh buy up dese ziggaboos and give ’em away" (Hurston 141). This statement suggests that Tea Cake is more concerned with appearing successful than many critics admit. Although Tea Cake is not a wealthy man, his possession of Janie gives him a degree of status. Like the men of Eatonville, the men on the muck regard Janie as a highly desirable possession. Tea Cake’s boast that she is also rich simply enhances her desirability. Janie’s beauty and wealth elevate Tea Cake’s
own status since on the muck as in Eatonville a man who is able to maintain a beautiful woman is viewed as superior to the average man.

Tea Cake also manifests an unwillingness to admit to feelings of insecurity. In order to hide these feelings he resorts, as Joe did, to displays of power. Tea Cake’s motivation for having Janie work in the fields does not, as S. Jay Walker claims, stem from his desire that Janie be with him so that they can share all aspects of their lives (526), but from unspoken feelings of jealousy and a desire to prove that Janie will submit to his whims. After a short time on the muck, Tea Cake begins to return home at odd hours, telling Janie that he has "Come tuh see 'bout you. De boogerman liable tuh tote yuh off whilst Ah’m gone" (Hurston 126). This thinly disguised checking up on Janie indicates a degree of jealousy not previously seen in Tea Cake’s character. Although he claims to trust Janie, it is at this point he tells her, "you betta come git uh job uh work out dere lak de rest uh de women" (Hurston 127). It is important to note that Tea Cake does not ask Janie to work, as Wendy McCreadie says in "Authority and Authorization in Their Eyes Were Watching God. Instead he tells Janie, "you betta come git uh job...." (Hurston 127). Tea Cake’s refusal to admit that he is jealous leads him to require of Janie a reaffirmation of her subordinate position. Janie’s unquestioning compliance with Tea Cake’s demand further undermines critical assertions that the relationship is based on companionship and not traditional
male/female roles.

When Mrs. Turner begins to belittle Tea Cake in hopes of matching Janie with her brother, Turner's contempt once again activates Tea Cake's jealousy. Even though Janie assures Tea Cake that she loves him, he beats her "not because her behavior justified his jealousy, but it relieved that awful fear inside him. Being able to whip her reassured him in possession. No brutal beating at all. He just slapped her around a bit to show he was boss" (Hurston 140). Once again, Tea Cake's action and Janie's reaction reflect traditional behavior instead of illustrating the liberation often portrayed by critics.

The physical violence that periodically erupts between the couple is foreshadowed in their first encounter when Tea Cake says, "Could yuh lemme have uh pound uh knuckle puddin' till Saturday? Ah'm sho tuh pay yuh then" (Hurston 94). The statement implies the potential for violence on the part of both Janie and Tea Cake, and each eventually delivers the "'knuckle puddin'." Goaded by Tea Cake's flirtation with Nunkie, Janie cuts off his explanations "with a blow" (Hurston 131). Instead of shattering her image of Tea Cake, however, their fight is portrayed as a preliminary to lovemaking. In fact, Missy Dehn Kubitschek views Janie's willingness to use violence as a positive step in her journey toward selfhood--an admission of the intensity of her feelings. In doing so, Kubitschek implicitly condones Tea Cake's later beating of Janie to assert his rights of possession because it is not
"used to enforce an action or behavior, but...to make another person aware" (112). Wendy McCreadie explicitly condones this beating, claiming that it is a manifestation of Tea Cake’s love and desire to protect Janie (28)—a ludicrous idea if we are to accept this relationship as liberating. What, after all, is liberating about being beaten in the name of love?

Critics’ defense of physical abuse as an expression of love is extremely disturbing, as is the novel’s description of the obvious envy that Janie’s passive acceptance of the beating arouses in the community. The morning after, Tea Cake pampers Janie in a way that makes "the women see visions and the helpless way she hung on him made men dream dreams" (Hurston 140). Like the rest of the Everglades community, Janie sees abuse as proof that Tea Cake loves and desires her. The community’s response heightens the notion that physical violence in the name of love is acceptable, possibly even desirable. The fact that modern critics also condone Tea Cake’s beating of Janie reinforces this belief. Critical propagation of this idea is particularly disquieting since these same critics ask us to believe that this is a liberating relationship.

Hurston herself apparently endorsed or at least accepted violence as an integral part of male/female relationships. In her autobiography Dust Tracks on A Road, Hurston describes a relationship that mirrors the reciprocal violence of Janie and Tea Cake:

Let me seem too cordial with any male and something
was going to happen. Just let him smile too broad at any woman, and no sooner did we get inside my door than the war was on! One night (I didn’t decide this) something primitive inside me tore past the barriers and before I realized it I had slapped his face. That was a mistake. He was still smoldering from an incident a week old.... So I had unknowingly given him an opening he had been praying for. He paid me off then and there with interest. No broken bones, you understand, and no black eyes. I realized afterwards that my hot head could tell me to beat him, but it would cost me something. (252)

The incidents described by Hurston in her novel and in her autobiography are reflective of a society that rewards and rationalizes violence as an appropriate means of achieving one’s goals. Although the love between Janie and Tea Cake apparently makes it perhaps more palatable to some critics, the acceptance of violence in the name of love seriously undermines their contention that this relationship is ideal.

Critical minimization of major flaws in this supposedly ideal relationship indicates complicity with Hurston’s need to establish a fulfilling male/female relationship while maintaining the illusion of Janie’s increasing independence from male domination. This complicity can be explained by the need of black and/or feminist critics to establish their own literary heritage. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in his afterword to Their Eyes Were Watching God, says: "The deeply satisfying
aspect of the rediscovery of Zora Neale Hurston is that black women generated it primarily to establish a maternal literary ancestry" (186). Alice Walker illustrates this point in her statement that since, as a student, she "heard not one word about early black women writers, one of my first tasks was simply to determine whether they had existed" (9). As a once celebrated author of the Harlem Renaissance, Hurston was both credible and far enough removed to qualify as a literary precursor to the growing number of black women writers in the 1960s and 1970s. More importantly, Hurston’s heroines were not tragic mulattas but simply women searching for happiness and meaning.

Hurston’s writing struck a chord with Walker and others who were searching for a role model in earlier black women. However, their desire for a literary forebear seems to have blinded them to the less progressive aspects of Hurston’s novels. How else can one account for Alice Walker’s initial explanation of Tea Cake’s unprovoked beating of Janie as "simply a ‘mistake’ on Hurston’s part" (305) or for Missy Dehn Kubitschek’s assertion that violence is a social trial over which Janie triumphs because "she accepts Tea Cake’s anger and does not interfere with the community’s violent annihilation of this threat to its integrity" (111). This violence ultimately detracts from the presentation of their marriage as an equitable partnership. It does not matter that Janie, in a fit of jealousy, is able to hit Tea Cake, whereas she would never have considered striking Logan or Joe. The fact remains
that Tea Cake uses his superior physical strength to reinforce both his and the community’s perception of Janie as his property. Janie’s passive acceptance of abuse only reinforces the patriarchal status quo. It does nothing toward the promotion of female autonomy.

In spite of Janie’s idealization of Tea Cake, it is clear that she cannot establish her independence while married to him. Hurston’s disguise of the final conflict between the couple as self-defense in the face of madness enables Hurston to imply the possibility of an equitable, non-repressive love while freeing Janie from the bonds of a male/female relationship. As Donald Marks points out, "To have Tea Cake become enraged to the point of killing Janie without the factor of madness would make all heterosexual unions seem impossible, just as would Janie’s killing or leaving him for a more mundane reason" (156). To acknowledge that Tea Cake exhibits behavioral patterns and notions of status similar to those of Joe and Logan would be to lose the possibility of romantic love. By labeling Tea Cake’s final act of violence the result of madness brought on by hydrophobia contracted while saving Janie’s life, Hurston makes it possible for Janie to retain the impression of Tea Cake as a romantic hero instead of a figure of repression. Critical comment conveniently ignores or rationalizes the earlier violent phases of Janie and Tea Cake’s relationship in order to advance their views of Janie as a feminist prototype.

Nellie McKay asserts that with Tea Cake’s death Janie "is
free to discover security in herself, and the courage to speak
in her own black woman's voice, no longer dependent on men....
Now she could begin to live through her newly found woman-
identified self" (63). Janie's flouting of popular opinion,
her participation in the community on the muck, and her
shooting of Tea Cake hint once again at a new Janie—a woman
who is willing to trust her instincts rather than listen to
conventional wisdom. Janie finally seems ready to take her
place in the community and reveal the knowledge gained in her
travels. Instead of doing so, however, Janie tells Pheoby:
"Ah don't mean to bother wid tellin' 'em nothin', Pheoby.
'Tain't worth de trouble. You can tell 'em what Ah say if you
wants to. Dat's just de same as me 'cause mah tongue is in
mah friend's mouf" (Hurston 6). With this statement, Janie
relinquishes her responsibility for the manner in which her
tale will be told.

Although Pheoby feels "ten feet higher" (Hurston 182)
after listening to Janie, she cannot tell Janie's story
effectively because, as Janie herself says, "you got tuh go
there tuh know there" (Hurston 183). Pheoby, with her second-
hand knowledge of Janie's experiences, cannot possibly be as
effective as Janie in relating Janie's story. Janie's
abdication of personal responsibility for the accurate telling
of her tale, as well as her choice of the private back porch
instead of the public forum of the front porch, is a symptom
of Janie's intentional withdrawal from community life. By
empowering Pheoby to speak for her, Janie encloses herself in
the prison of silence from which she struggled to escape. The woman who longed to express herself ends by deliberately cultivating an "other" to relate the tale of her quest. Janie has returned, not to share her experiences, but to shut herself up with memories of Tea Cake in the security of Eatonville.

Janie's self-imposed isolation from the community of which she once longed to be a part negates the critical view that portrays her as the heroine who will be the instrument of change in Eatonville. Janie indicates her lack of interest in being a model for others when she tells Pheoby: "Ah'm back home agin and Ah'm satisfied tuh be heah. Ah done been tuh de horizon and back and now Ah kin set heah in mah house and live by comparisons" (Hurston 182). Janie's act of shutting up the house is symbolic of closing herself in with memories, and the immediate appearance of Tea Cake prancing about in Janie's mind furthers this association:

Of course he wasn't dead. He could never be dead until she herself had finished feeling and thinking. The kiss of his memory made pictures of love and light against the wall. Here was peace. She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it from around her shoulder. So much of life in its meshes! She called in her soul to come and see.

(Hurston 183-184)

Janie's pulling in of the horizon is reminiscent of Nanny's pulling and pinching of the horizon until it was small
enough to choke Janie. In this instance, however, Janie voluntarily shrinks her horizon in order to retain her memory of Tea Cake. Janie's decision against using her hard-won knowledge to claim her right to active participation in the community detracts from Janie's status as a model of an early feminist. As Hortense Spillers remarks in "A Hateful Passion, A Lost Love,"

the author has broken the potential pattern of revolt by having her resigned, as if she were ready for a geriatric retirement, to the town of frustrated love.... what she thinks about her life at that point seems inappropriate to the courageous defiance that she has often embodied all along.

(310-311)

Janie's retreat from the community is symptomatic of her limitations as a full-blown feminist heroine. Critics who portray Janie as a woman who realizes her potential for independence overlook the undercurrents of Hurston's novel. Janie's reliance upon successive husbands in her search for happiness, her refusal to accept the responsibility of owning property, and her acceptance of physical abuse as the price for love indicate that Janie is ultimately unable to visualize a fulfilling life without a man. Janie's search for equality, love, and independence ends, not with her triumph over patriarchal oppression" (Ferguson 187), but with her capitulation to a man whose basic values are quite similar to those she rejected in Logan and Joe.
Janie is unable to achieve independence because she is as much a product of the demands of patriarchal society as her husbands are. As Mary Helen Washington points out in her foreword to *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston... put Janie on the track of autonomy, self-realization, and independence, but she also places Janie in the position of romantic heroine as the object of Tea Cake's quest.... What *Their Eyes* shows us is a woman writer struggling with the problem of the questing hero as woman and the difficulties in 1937 of giving a woman character such power and such daring. (xiv)

Ultimately, Washington's analysis of Janie is one of the most realistic critical assessments. It emphasizes Hurston's achievements in the creation of a character who has some feminist traits, but also acknowledges the fact that Janie is far from a prototypical feminist. I would go even further, and assert that, while Janie is indeed placed on the road toward independence, she remains primarily a traditional woman. Each major change in Janie's life, from her elopement with Joe to her flouting of society's conventions, is the direct result of the influence of the men in her life. Joe precipitates her abandonment of Logan, while Tea Cake is the vehicle for Janie's release from societal strictures. The fact that even after Janie's "liberation" from convention, she continues to submit to Tea Cake's every desire illustrates how far Janie actually is from being the instrument of a feminist
revolution in Eatonville.

Janie's liberation from the gender roles prescribed by the patriarchal system is virtually impossible because these values are an integral part of her culture. As Peter Filene, in his analysis of the difficulties in the search for equal partnership between men and women, observes, modern lovers "were trying to write a new, egalitarian script for their relationship but continuing to cast each other and themselves in essentially their old roles" (175). This statement, from the 1986 edition of Him/Her/Self, reflects Hurston's problems in attempting to portray an egalitarian marriage in 1937. Although Hurston's creation of Janie indicates her desire to promote the independence of black women, the relationships and behavior of her characters are unavoidably influenced by Hurston's own exposure to patriarchal society's understanding of male and female roles. The social structure of 1937 still discouraged the creation of a female character, particularly a black one, as an independent entity.

Although Janie does not achieve the liberation with which she is credited by critics such as Kubitschek, Walker, and McKay, she is nonetheless an invaluable model for modern feminist authors. With Janie, Hurston bridges the gap between the nineteenth century tragic mulatta figures of Iola LeRoy and Clotelle and mid-twentieth century heroines such as Alice Walker's Celie and Toni Morrison's Sula. Hurston's literature provided encouragement, as well as a role model, for Alice Walker and other modern black female authors. While the
extent of Janie’s feminist awakening is exaggerated, Hurston’s contribution to modern feminist literature should not be undervalued.
WORKS CITED


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