

THE LIMITS OF LOVEMAKING AND COMMUNITY: INFERTILITY IN *THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD*

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ABSTRACT

Janie Crawford, the protagonist in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), never fully grows up or integrates completely into any of the communities of which she is a part in the novel. She therefore remains "infertile" in several relationships and communities that showcase diverse kinds of "fertility," whether that fertility is Logan Killicks's productivity with his farmland, Jody Starks's successes in building Eatonville, or even Tea Cake's skills at gambling and guitar-playing. No matter her environment, Janie remains outside of systems of fertility, more child-like than adult, which means that the blossoming pear tree image that surrounds her, and which seems to epitomize sexuality and fertility, is wasted on Janie, because she refuses to grow up and become fertile either by procreating or by contributing creatively to the communities in which she lives.

RESUMEN

Janie Crawford, la protagonista de *Sus ojos miraban a Dios* (1937), de Zora Neale Hurston, nunca se hace del todo adulta ni se integra completamente en ninguna de las comunidades de las que forma parte en la novela. Por tanto, permanece "estéril" en varias relaciones y comunidades que son emblemáticas de diferentes tipos de "fertilidad," sea esta fertilidad la productividad de Logan Killicks con su granja, los éxitos de Jody Starks en la construcción de Eatonville, o incluso las habilidades de Tea Cake para el juego y la

guitarra. En cualquiera que sea su entorno, Janie permanece fuera de los sistemas de fertilidad, más infantil que adulta, lo que significa que la imagen del peral en flor que la acompaña, y que parece ser el epitome de la sexualidad y la fertilidad, se desperdicia en el caso de Janie, ya que ella se niega a crecer y a convertirse en fértil ya sea procreando o contribuyendo de forma creativa a las comunidades en las que vive.

Let's start with the blossoming pear tree, which is where most scholars begin when they want to discuss sexuality—and by extension, fertility—in Zora Neale Hurston's classic novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). From the moment those arching calyxes rise to meet the pollinating bee, Hurston offers images of budding and unrepressed sexuality and growth implicitly if not explicitly throughout the text. When protagonist Janie Crawford is so stirred by that natural pollination that she kisses the no-count Johnny Taylor in full view of her grandmother, sexuality looms over the text. Grandmother Nanny wants Janie to get married right away because she senses that transformative sexual changes are upon Janie. Rather than run the risk of a wildly sexual Janie bringing an illegitimate child into her home, Nanny determines that Janie should marry Logan Killicks, a neighboring farmer, and contain her potentially explosive sexuality within a marriage bed. Well, we know how that turns out. Janie is bored out of her skull with Logan's unromantic body and behaviors, as well as his smelly feet, and she cares nothing for his status of sixty acres of land and an organ in the parlor. What is even more striking is that a novel that begins in such wondrous sensuality and potential fertility devolves into barrenness and innuendo rather than explicit culmination of the sexual topic Hurston has introduced. The Zora Neale Hurston who is so iconoclastic in practically everything else she does abandons sensuality, sexuality, and fertility in favor of barely romanticized tradeoffs for intimate engagement.

I use fertility in this discussion, first, to refer to biological procreativity and then to refer to productive growth or contributions to familial or social institutions. Characters whom I reference as infertile, then, yield no biological reproduction during the course of the narrative; in other words, the major characters in the novel, including Janie, Logan, Jody, and Tea Cake, neither mother nor father children. Nor do they seem to have any interest in doing so. Among the things that readers might consider their priorities,

pregnancy and children have no ranking at all. Infertility does not mean that the characters *cannot* have children; it means that there is no indication whatsoever that they desire children or even think about them. Second, despite this conspicuous biological lack, there are various kinds of fertility in the narrative, including natural (plants, trees, the farming that Logan does), social (building the town of Eatonville), cultural (abundant folk materials that sustain and entertain), political (Jody Starks's ventures as mayor), commercial (Jody's building the store and starting the post office, among others), and interpersonal (Tea Cake, for example, teaching Janie how to play checkers, fish, and shoot). In a southern world lush with plant-life and productive people, Janie, who is a woman without children and who is locked outside the intimate interworkings of most of the communities in which she resides, is surprisingly infertile.

While I use infertility to refer to the biological lack of having children, I further use it to refer to the psychological, emotional, and social states of characters, particularly Janie. I posit that family units and societies in the text are based upon the willing participation of various of their members in order to ensure orderly functioning. When members are physically within such units and societies but are outside of them psychologically or refuse to contribute to them, then a state of infertility exists. For example, a husband might reasonably expect a wife to contribute to the success of the household, as Logan does with Janie. If she does not, then a state of dysfunctionality reigns, a state that I refer to as infertility. At the societal level, officials might reasonably expect that citizens of a particular city will pay their fair share in taxes so that essential services such as water and sewage and road repair can be maintained. If revenues are insufficient, then the city cannot operate effectively. The resulting dysfunctionality falls under my definition of infertility; the city stagnates, tax-paying citizens become disgruntled, and the state could border on chaos. There can be little productive growth (fertility) or movement forward given these circumstances. These expectations manifest themselves in Eatonville when citizens join Mayor Jody Starks in contributing hogs for the barbecue to celebrate the lamp lighting as well as when they contribute sweat equity to clearing/building a road. By joining in the heavy work, the disgruntled few avert social infertility and thus prevent communal stagnation.

I also use infertility to refer specifically to Janie's seeming preference to remain in a childlike state instead of progressing

toward maturity and becoming a productive member of whatever institution or community of which she is a part. As I will illustrate, more often than not, Janie finds herself resisting whatever grown-up, adult actions might be required of her and looking backward to her state of innocence, a state that gets iconized in the text with the blossoming pear tree. Ironically, the image of fertility that informs the image that most influences Janie is simultaneously the image to which Janie can never live up, that is, giving herself wholly to natural impulses and joining in creation. Further, Janie represents infertility in the ways in which she is/allows herself to be positioned in relation to the men in her life, especially to Jody. Janie is crammed into spaces where she will not or cannot respond by becoming a fertile, that is, contributing member of a unit or society. Instead, she is forced outside of the society, into the barren infertility of isolation from the members of the very community in Eatonville of which she so desperately wants to be a part and finally from Jody himself. Initially by choice and then by social/spousal control, Janie leads a barren existence in the midst of procreativity and growth all around her.

Again—let’s begin at the beginning. The sexuality that Nanny thought would be Janie’s lot after watching her kiss Johnny Taylor is nowhere to be found in Janie’s relationship with Logan Killicks. Of course Janie does not consider Logan particularly attractive. However, if she is such an unrestrained sexual being, then certainly there could be at least one scene in the text to illustrate how that plays itself out in a moment of passion—or even how it does *not* play out. Instead, Hurston allows Janie to slip into a marriage, complain about it, and even depart from it without ever having shown any inkling of the sexual intimacy of that marriage. More important—and what becomes an issue throughout the text—is that the presumably sensual, sexual Janie Crawford Killicks never once mentions menses or even remotely considers the realistic possibility of pregnancy. Janie operates during her marriage to Logan Killicks as if she is on a permanent form of birth control, or, perhaps more naively, as if she doesn’t know where babies come from. When Nanny asks if she is pregnant, Janie dismisses the idea so quickly that it seems as if she does not recognize her body as being capable of pregnancy. She moves from at least giving the idea a passing thought by saying, blushing, “No’m, Ah don’t think so anyhow” to absolute certainty that she is **not** pregnant: “Ah’m all right dat way. Ah *know* ‘tain’t

nothin' dere" (Hurston 21). How is it, then, that a presumably healthy young woman, portrayed in a period when birth control was practically unheard of in her community, can engage in pregnancy-proof sex not just through one marriage but through **three**?

Equally as striking, why is it that not one of Janie's husbands is concerned about offspring? This is especially remarkable with Logan Killicks, who is operating in an historical time period when African Americans were linked to the soil and farming, indeed when many of them were bound to sharecropping, and during which having as many offspring as possible was not only a pleasurable engagement but an economic necessity. Yet Logan only attempts—bunglingly so—to get a mule for Janie to plow instead of broaching the subject of fathering an offspring to assist him in his work. We might reasonably expect that Jody Starks, who works so diligently to acquire huge amounts of land and property, would want a son to inherit both instead of being content with Hezekiah to serve as his delivery boy. Yet, it is noteworthy that Jody **never** mentions babies or pregnancy, and there is never a moment in the novel when he and Janie share intimate moments in bed. Strikingly, even on their wedding night, they are content to act like a sexless old married couple instead of making mad—or at least passionate—love. Hurston writes of their activity following their marriage ceremony: "They sat on the boarding house porch and saw the sun plunge into the same crack in the earth from which the night emerged" (Hurston 31). The next sentence, which begins a new chapter, is that they are on a train on their way to Maitland. The anticipated blossoming pear trees and blooms that Jody's presence promised initially get pushed into the background in favor of respectability and then in favor of a capitalistic agenda. Jody may be fertile—impressively so—in nurturing and growing the town of Eatonville economically and socially, but he is woefully lacking in any fertility in the bedroom. Janie's famous insult to Jody—that, when he takes down his pants, he looks like the change of life (Hurston 75)—is perhaps the ultimate condemnation in this infertility theme. What is change of life but the absence of the ability to procreate? Even more insulting is that Janie applies a concept usually associated with females to the rapidly-declining Jody and thus shatters his blustering male ego. The incident highlights his infertility so insultingly that he can only slap Janie in response.

Even the prized Tea Cake, whom Janie considers the long-awaited bee to her blossom, is not the least concerned about

fathering children and establishing a living legacy. We could argue that his itinerant lifestyle makes him the least of the three husbands who would be interested in that possibility; however, his supposed passion for Janie might reasonably be expected to include a component devoted to their future and any living legacy the couple might leave behind. As with Janie's marriage to Jody, on Janie's and Tea Cake's wedding night, Janie and Tea Cake spend it in a curious way—they “rested that night” (Hurston 112), Hurston asserts, though there had been “hugging and kissing and carrying on” (Hurston 112) upon Janie's arrival in Jacksonville. The next day Janie and Tea Cake go out sightseeing. Of course we can read between the syllables of that resting, for we know that they engaged in sexual relations before their marriage (Hurston 109), so naturally those relations would continue. Nonetheless, it is worthy of note that no interest in offspring develops during the course of the novel for any of the three husbands; they live in the here and now, performing perfunctory sexual duties and short circuiting any claims to biological fertility—even though they might be quite fertile in working the land, as Logan is, or conducting business, as with Jody, or even gambling, as with Tea Cake.

Janie, as noted, is equally uninterested in babies, pregnancy, and living legacy. She comes from a rural background and wants to participate in activities, such as folktale telling and sharing lies, that she identifies as being folk and possibly a part of the soil, yet she remains, in the words of Jean Toomer in speaking of his character Kabnis, his misplaced Northerner in southern territory, “suspended a few feet above the soil whose touch would resurrect [her],”¹ which means that she is *in* her various environments but not truly *of* them. In other words, like Kabnis, Janie is physically, socially, and psychologically barren in the midst of fertility. How, then, do we as readers and scholars account for that set of circumstances? In searching for an explanation, scholars point routinely to Hurston's superimposition of her own biography and desires upon her protagonist to explain the physical barrenness. Without children herself, and without the desire to have them or the time or inclination to nurture them, Hurston declined to attach responsibilities to Janie that she herself would not accept—or so this narrative goes. The consequence is that Janie is a thing *out of nature*,

¹ Jean Toomer. *Cane*. Norton, 1988, p. 98.

a being antithetical to her social circles, a barren blight upon the landscape of fertility with which she is surrounded in the novel. With all the scholarly talk of Janie searching for and finding herself, aspiring to feminist ideals (which I dispute),² and a host of other good things, few have paused to consider Janie as a dysfunctional, unproductive entity, an obstruction in the environments in which she lives. It is that perspective that I want to offer as a new approach to the novel.

Fertility has to do with growth and procreation, which Janie resists from the very beginning of the narrative. When Nanny concludes that Janie's kissing Johnny Taylor is an indication of her reaching womanhood, Janie complains: "Naw, Nanny, naw Ah ain't no real 'oman yet. ' The thought was too new and heavy for Janie. She fought it away" (Hurston 12). The fact that Nanny then wraps the sixteen-year-old Janie in her arms, hauls her onto her lap, and rocks her (Hurston 14), reiterates the childish imagery and the fighting against growing up. After this pause, Janie pleads with Nanny not to "make" her marry Logan, and she wails: "Lemme wait, Nanny, please, jus' a lil bit mo'" (Hurston 15). Age might make the plea understandable, except for the knowledge that Hurston offers it against the backdrop of a time when girls *much younger* than sixteen often were married off routinely. We could argue, therefore, that Janie has already lived a carefree life beyond the time that her culture and community warrant. The fact that she fights against moving into the traditions of that culture and community positions the text, in this instance at least, as a kind of anti-bildungsroman.

Janie also fights against womanhood during the time she is with Logan by preferring the daydreams and romantic notions of a child or an adolescent to the realistic duties of a wife. She judges Logan harshly because he does not fit into her childhood, storybook dreams, and she is not remotely interested in the fertility that is inherent in his farming. Seeds that sprout into vegetables hold no interest for her at this point in the novel. Manure that fertilizes the seeds and ensures that fertility only evokes disgust from Janie. By remaining a doll baby in the world of men and women, Janie fails to grow and assimilate into her environment. Of course we could argue

² Please see my chapter, "Celebrating Bigamy and Other Outlaw Behaviors: Hurston, Reputation, and the Problems Inherent in Labeling Janie a Feminist." *Approaches to Teaching Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God and Other Works*, edited by John W. Lowe, MLA Publications, 2009, pp. 67-80.

reasons for her failure; nonetheless, it is a failure. Logan is consistently productive; Janie is consistently rejecting of that productivity even as she understands it to be the source of her livelihood. Indeed, in a childish outburst with Nanny, she describes Logan as looking “like some ole skullhead in de grave yard” (Hurston 13), a deathly infertile image that suits the way she thinks in her disdain for all the growth with which Logan is surrounded. She also childishly asserts that “Some folks never was meant to be loved and he’s one of ‘em” (Hurston 22). This lack of generosity toward someone whose only crime, so to speak, is loving her illustrates yet again Janie’s refusal to embrace maturity.

In this analysis, I equate Janie’s refusal to grow up, to assimilate into adult environments, her voluntary and forced positions as an outsider, as a part of this infertility paradigm. By remaining outside the bonds of marriage in her relationship with Logan, Janie is infertile in an environment that thrives on fertility. By rejecting Logan, she rejects growth and any version of life that is larger than her imagination. By being uninterested in or incapable of having children, she rejects her status as woman and wife, and she rejects any obligation to generations that follow her. In other words, Janie’s infertility, as I label it here, is basically a refusal to grow up and accept adult responsibilities. She expects Logan to take care of her with little recognition that she might consider doing something for him in return. Certainly she cooks and willingly does the “woman’s work” that she identifies as her role or responsibility in the marriage, and, in a rare verbalization, she is vocal in adhering to societally defined roles as well as in rejecting any other than a compartmentalized partnership with Logan. Note this exchange with Logan one morning after he asks Janie to help him move a pile of manure before it gets too hot:

You don’t need mah help out dere, Logan. Youse in yo’ place and Ah’m in mine. ’

You ain’t got no particular place. It’s wherever Ah need yuh. Git uh move on yuh, and dat quick. ’

Mah mamma didn’t tell me Ah wuz born in no hurry. So whut business Ah got rushin’ now? Anyhow dat ain’t whut youse mad about. Youse mad ‘cause Ah don’t fall down and wash-up dese sixty acres uh ground yuh got. You ain’t done me no favor by marryin’ me. And if dat’s what you call yo’self doin’, Ah don’t thank yuh for it. Youse mad ‘cause Ah’m tellin’ yuh whut you already knowed. ’ (Hurston 30)

This conversation occurs the morning after Janie has asked Logan how he would respond if she were to run off and leave him, which comes after she has been seeing Jody for two weeks. The uncharacteristic talking, therefore, has been prompted and sweetened by Jody's presence and Janie's knowledge that she will indeed be leaving shortly. The speech is childishly spiteful, uttered by an immature person who has not learned the skill of civil disagreement. As the speech indicates, however, during her time with Logan, Janie seems to have fulfilled her household duties—and perhaps even her conjugal duties—grudgingly, without overall commitment to the project of growing up and becoming a productive, creative, and reproductive member of her community and partner to her husband. She seems to think that Logan—or someone—will take care of her no matter the ungratefulness or the harshness of her attitude toward them.

This expectation that someone will take care of her continues with Jody Starks, as Janie imbues him with the blossoming pear tree image that Logan has failed to embody. Note how Janie, once she arrives at the rendezvous point to run off with Jody, embraces the high chair imagery that will later become so prominent with Jody even as she assigns the bee imagery to Jody:

He was very solemn and helped her to the seat beside him [on the hired rig]. With him on it, it sat like some high, ruling chair. From now on until death she was going to have flower dust and springtime sprinkled over everything. A bee for her bloom. Her old thoughts were going to come in handy now, but new words would have to be made and said to fit them. (Hurst 31)

Note as well this conscious returning to pre-Logan days as well as, earlier, her continuing refusal to grow up in her initial interactions with Jody. He views her as a child of sorts, which he fails to realize makes him a budding pedophile in his desire for Janie. When he learns that Janie is married and that her husband has gone to fetch a mule for her to help him with plowing, he responds with incredulity to both pieces of information:

“You married? You ain't hardly old enough to be weaned. [. . .] You behind a plow! You ain't got no mo' business wid uh plow than uh hog is got wid uh holiday! You ain't got no business cuttin' up no seed p'taters neither. A pretty doll-baby lak you is made to sit on de

front porch and rock and fan yo'self and eat p'taters dat other folks plant just special for you" (Hurston 27, 28).

Jody also speculates, accurately so, that Janie still probably likes sugar-tits. She asserts that not only does she like sugar-tits, but she likes sweetening water as well. These sugary treats are identified with children, which highlights again Janie's refusal to grow up, her insistence upon being infertile in environments where fertility reigns.

That pattern continues during the more than twenty years that Janie is with Jody. Initially classed off, forced to be an outsider, Janie nonetheless acquiesces in that role until she offers the fatal insult to Jody. Janie's outsider status begins when Jody refuses to allow Janie to speak upon their arrival in town: "Thank yuh fuh yo' compliments, but mah wife don't know nothin' 'bout no speech-making'. Ah never married her for nothin' lak dat. She's uh woman and her place is in de home" (Hurston 40-41). While the comment makes Janie uncomfortable, and she must force herself to laugh, it is ironically an echo of her own philosophy in her relationship with Logan. Superimposed rather than voluntarily instated is the distinction that does not make a difference, as Toni Morrison would say,³ so Janie ends the evening "feeling cold" as she contemplates what marriage to Jody might truly mean and particularly in this instance when he speaks "without giving her a chance to say anything one way or another"; Jody's action "took the bloom off of things" (Hurston 41) as effectively as it separates Janie firmly from the remainder of the community.

That forced separation and thus infertility continues when Janie is unable to participate in the front porch banter, especially about Matt Bonner's mule:

Janie loved the conversation and sometimes she thought up good stories on the mule, but Joe had forbidden her to indulge. He didn't

³ In *Tar Baby* (New York: Knopf/Plume, 1981), Toni Morrison includes the following exchange between the older Valerian Street and his younger wife Margaret when Margaret asks:

"...What's the matter with you? . . . Why do you cut yourself off from everybody, everything?"

"It's just that I'm undergoing this very big change in my life called dying."

"Retirement isn't death."

"A distinction without a difference."

"Well, I am not dying. I am living."

"A difference without distinction." (26)

want her talking after such trashy people. "You'se Mrs. Mayor Starks, Janie. I god, Ah can't see what uh woman uh yo' stability would want tuh be treasurin' all that gum-grease from folks dat don't even own de house dey sleep in. 'Tain't no earthy use. They's jus some puny humans playin' roun de toes uh Time." (Hurston 50-51)

The tongue that Janie used so liberally with Logan has mostly disappeared during the early years with Jody, and she acquiesces to her outsider status. Jody is equally adamant about her not attending the dragging out of Matt Bonner's dead mule as he asserts that he will attend in his role as mayor but Janie cannot: "But *you* ain't goin' off in all dat mess uh commonness. Ah'm surprised at yuh fuh askin'" (Hurston 56; original emphasis). In a community that is fertile, thriving, and growing, Janie is simply getting older in a place where people banter, entertain, talk, laugh, chide each other, and tell lies. The drawing out of Matt Bonner's dead mule is one conspicuous instance of that. Another is the lengthy conversation between the two men on the store porch who argue about the merits of nature versus caution (Hurston 60-62). Yet another is the interaction between men on the porch and the sassy young women who walk by in a deliberate effort to get their attention (Hurston 63-65). In the face of all these activities, Janie is a mere onlooker.

Janie is thus not growing up or assimilating into her environment. She is positioned as an exhibition, a static, pedestaled symbol of Jody's success. Jody forces her to be Mrs. Mayor, the bell cow, and thus places her outside the normal relations of the community in which she lives. Her status is obvious on the evening that Jody opens his newly-built store.

Jody told her to dress up and stand in the store all that evening. 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. So she put on one of her bought dresses and went up the new-cut road all dressed in wine-colored red. Her silken ruffles rustled and muttered about her. The other women had on percale and calico with here and there a head-rag among the older ones. (Hurston 39)

Later, during some of the stories about the mule, "when Lige or Sam or Walter or some of the other big picture talkers were using a side of the world for a canvas, Joe would hustle her off inside the store to

sell something. Look like he took pleasure in doing it. Why couldn't he go himself sometimes? She had come to hate the inside of that store" (Hurston 51). Yet, Janie "starches and irons" (Hurston 83, 84) her face and does Jody's bidding. Given this set of circumstances, Janie thus becomes a living monument to Jody's ego, a painting come down from the walls of a museum to impress ignorant backwoods viewers, an object to be contemplated (we could also position Janie here as comparable to a child in traditional African American communities, where children were expected to be seen and not heard). Art objects do not have participatory functions in the communities in which they find themselves. They simply exist, which is what Janie does in her position of infertility.

In one of the many ironies of the text, it is striking that Jody's desire for Janie to be separate from or above her environment echoes the desire that Nanny had for Janie. Remember that Nanny imagines preaching a sermon in which Janie realizes the text: "Ah wanted to preach a great sermon about colored women sittin' on high, but they wasn't no pulpit for me. . . . Ah said Ah'd save de text for you. Ah been waitin' a long time, Janie, but nothin' Ah been through ain't too much if you just take a stand on high ground lak Ah dreamed" (Hurston 15, 16). Displacing her desires onto Janie, whether Janie wants them or not, aligns Nanny in her images of elevation with Jody and his intent that Janie should be more and higher than all the women around her. Similarly, Nanny wants Janie to "class off" from the likes of common Johnny Taylor by "pick[ing] from a higher bush and a sweeter berry" (Hurston 13). Nanny's higher bush is equivalent to Jody's bell cow. In Nanny's imagination, Janie would be better than those around her; she would set the example to which others would aspire. Of course Nanny's philosophy is not as carefully worked out as is Jody's, but it shares sufficient kinship to Jody's to warrant placing Nanny and Jody together. Such placement means that both push Janie into positions of infertility by suggesting that she is too good for the environments in which she resides. After all, pedestals, by their very elevation, position their occupants to look down upon and be scornful of those not sharing their elevation. Both Nanny and Jody, therefore, ultimately stifle Janie's growth, with Nanny perhaps doing so out of ignorance while Jody does so much more calculatedly.

The extent to which Janie has not grown is evident in her relationship with Tea Cake, the last man around whom she wraps

her fairytale, blossoming pear tree ideas. She thinks after she has spent some time with Tea Cake: "He could be a bee to a blossom—a pear tree blossom in the spring. He seemed to be crushing scent out of the world with his footsteps. Crushing aromatic herbs with every step he took. Spices hung about him. He was a glance from God" (Hurston 101-102). There is a romanticization, an innocence, a naïveté about all Janie's interactions with Tea Cake. And we could argue that, given the cloistered existence Janie has led with Jody, that is to be expected; however, it is also a leftover from her arrested state of development generally in preferring fairy tales to reality. Janie is like a child when Tea Cake teaches her how to play checkers as well as when he takes her fishing in the moonlight (and those *are* romantic, enjoyable activities for which a childlike glee could be understandable). She seems to be oblivious to how the townspeople are responding to her relationship to Tea Cake, which is again an indication of her pear-tree-blossoming, glazed-eye response to the man in whom she is yet again investing her long-delayed dreams.

Some of Janie's interactions during her time with Tea Cake showcase an amazing naïveté, however, such as Janie's conversations with and responses to the prejudiced Mrs. Turner and Janie's assertion that she does not understand what Mrs. Turner is trying to do in urging Janie to use her lighter-skinned features to class off from other black folks or in suggesting that she leave the dark-skinned Tea Cake for Mrs. Turner's light-skinned brother. When she tells Tea Cake that she does not know what Mrs. Turner has tried to do, Janie is an outsider who has not grown to understand the dynamics of skin color and intra-racial prejudice, which is especially surprising given the way that she learns that she is colored (the dark spot in the photo with all the other children on the plantation). Again, she is infertile, unknowing, in an environment where knowledge can make the difference between life and death, as becomes clear when black men in Palm Beach are pressed into service to dig graves for folks who died in the hurricane, and Tea Cake literally has to run for his life in escaping that impressment. Her seeming growing awareness of such issues at the end of the text reflects more Hurston's superimposing her own racial/color politics upon Janie rather than something Janie's experiences within the text have revealed. How, after the hurricane, for example, is Janie all of a sudden so knowledgeable about the necessity of being around white people who know her and Tea Cake when there has been no instance in the text when she has interacted with or exhibited an

awareness of white attitudes towards or willingness to impose their wills upon the lives of black people? Suddenly, she understands racial politics and recommends that Tea Cake remain hidden in their room away from whites who might impress him again to bury the dead or clear debris. Yet again the issue of maturity raises its head; is hiding, while understandable, the best solution to their predicament? Tea Cake obviously thinks not, and he recommends that they return to the muck, which they do.

Janie's connection to Mrs. Turner replicates in some ways the ties between Jody and Nanny. Knowingly or unknowingly, Janie participates in a "classing off" when she is so social with Mrs. Turner. It is already clear that, though Janie has finally succeeded in participating in community activities such as storytelling, dancing, listening to music, and cooking for her neighbors on the muck, she is still viewed as being different. She is different in presumed education, which folks refer to but which is not documented in any conclusive way in the text; after all, her speech is just as vernacular as that of her neighbors. She is different in working voluntarily in the bean fields instead of *having* to do that work. She is different apparently in her manners, for many of her neighbors conclude that she is higher up the social scale than they are. She is different in the physical features that align her more with the light-skinned Mrs. Turner than with the majority of her darker neighbors. And she is different in the very way that she tolerates Mrs. Turner, whom most of her darker-skinned neighbors recognize as a prejudiced, self-hating abomination. Socializing with Mrs. Turner means that Janie is at least willing to hear the vitriol that Mrs. Turner heaps on other black folks, and perhaps it means that, somewhere in her very being, Janie has accepted some of Jody's teaching that she is different and perhaps deserves to be an object of veneration. To be in Mrs. Turner's presence is to be in the midst of infertility by the definition of disrupting community and not being assimilated into it, for Mrs. Turner is intent upon reaping financial rewards from the black folks on the muck who eat at her café and giving them—beyond the food—nothing in return but insults.

While Mrs. Turner might be a blight on the muck, her presence and forced interactions with Janie do not overshadow the fact that Janie experiences more romance in this part of the text. She and Tea Cake bask in each other's company and make onlookers jealous by the love that defines their relationship. They do everything

together, and they seem to be thoroughly happy—though Janie has recurring doubts about how a younger man such as Tea Cake can truly love an older woman such as herself. Nonetheless, she is committed and engaged, and she indulges in more physical intimacy with Tea Cake than with either of her previous husbands. Indeed, one encounter between Janie and Tea Cake showcases the most passionate sexual moment in the text. Unfortunately, the impetus to it is Janie's jealousy of Nunkie, a young woman who picks beans with Janie and Tea Cake on the muck and who is intent upon having a relationship with Tea Cake. When Janie comes upon them tussling in a field after Nunkie has taken work tickets from Tea Cake's pocket in an effort to get him to pursue her, Janie, in a fit of anger, goes after Nunkie, who escapes easily. Turning her attention to Tea Cake, Janie initiates a fight that continues even after they return home. Hurston's description of the passion that results from that fighting broaches the most explicit description of a sexual encounter that Hurston portrays in the novel:

They fought on. 'You done hurt mah heart, now you come wid uh lie [denying he has a relationship with Nunkie] tuh bruise mah ears! Turn go mah hands!' Janie seethed. But Tea Cake never let go. They wrestled on until they were doped with their own fumes and emanations; till their clothes had been torn away; till he hurled her to the floor and held her there melting her resistance with the heat of his body, doing things with their bodies to express the inexpressible; kissed her until she arched her body to meet him and they fell asleep in sweet exhaustion. (Hurston 131-132)

This wonderful description is surrounded by jealousy and anger, both of which are emotions that only maturity can temper. Arguably, therefore, this passionate encounter still reflects Janie's propensity to adolescence. After all, she is married to Tea Cake, not Nunkie, so any discussion of the matter might best be with her husband instead of the imaginary lover. Nonetheless, Janie, who believes she has been cheated on, angrily, stereotypically, and without sufficient information, goes after the presumably offending female, which is not the most mature response to the situation. And she prefers to fight rather than discuss the matter, which represents another less than mature response, especially for a woman who is almost forty years old.

We might expect that the relationship with Tea Cake would end Janie's infertility or meditations on that theme in the novel. After all, Janie believes she has finally gotten the bee for her blossom. Unfortunately, that is not to be the case. The way in which the narrative ends—with the death of Tea Cake—is the ultimate lack of fulfillment. Consider a sequence of events that is awash in irony. It is Janie's desire to get a piece of tarp to cover Tea Cake while he sleeps after the hurricane that leads to his abrupt awakening and rescuing her from the rabid dog, which bites him on the cheek. The dog is fertile with rabies, which it transmits to Tea Cake. This polluted, poisonous fertility is one that Tea Cake then transfers to Janie when she shoots him and he bites her on the arm just before he dies. So, sadly, instead of giving Janie a baby, Tea Cake impregnates her with rabies. In effect, Janie is raped with a most destructive kind of fertility. Instead of fertility being rehabilitated in the text, then, it devolves into death and dying. And it leads to more outsider issues for Janie.

The formerly faithful neighbors who have loved both Tea Cake and Janie are not convinced initially that her shooting him has been in self-defense. So they act out what Janie experienced in Eatonville when some of her neighbors accused her of mistreating Jody at his death, that is, a deliberate distancing of themselves, which is manifested in the trial that Janie must undergo before she is absolved of a potential charge of murder:

They were all against her, she could see. So many were there against her that a light slap from each one of them would have beat her to death. She felt them pelting her with dirty thoughts. They were there with their tongues cocked and loaded, the only real weapon left to weak folks. The only killing tool they are allowed to use in the presence of white folks. (Hurston 176)

The "tongues cocked" anticipate Janie's return to Eatonville, where, as with this current situation on the muck, she remains an outsider as former neighbors attempt to kill her spirit with their words. Tea Cake's friends on the muck throw all of the things in her face that have previously separated Janie from the folks among whom she resides—her skin color, her financial privilege, her difference (however they define that concept). They also believe that the whites who control the trial favor Janie over the other black folks who want to testify about Tea Cake and Janie. Even when they re-instate

Janie, so to speak, when they dissolve their bitterness against her once they witness the funeral Janie plans for Tea Cake and once they ride from the muck to Palm Beach in the “ten sedans that Janie had hired” (Hurston 180) for the funeral, there is still an uneasy relationship between Janie and folks on the muck. She remains there only a few more weeks before she returns to Eatonville.

With no child from Tea Cake to hold memories of the deceased love of her life, Janie strives to move forward even as infertility continues to surround her. She does bring a packet of seeds from the muck with her to Eatonville and promises to plant them in memory of Tea Cake, but that possible fertility is not realized in the text. And the memories that she believes will sustain her will perhaps leave her in as arrested a state of development as that with which she began the narrative. She can surely call the spirit of Tea Cake into her home and thrive on memories of him, but those memories have no tangible productive force in her life. How long will she be happy to be surrounded by air that she labels Tea Cake? How long will it be before the consequences of being an outsider in Eatonville lead her to wander or re-evaluate? Given the Janie we have seen throughout the narrative, however, it is possible that she will indeed be content to wait, to wait with the memories until she dies. After all, waiting has been her chosen as well as her forced lot in life. She waited to love Logan, but she couldn't. She waited for Jody to realize that striving after things put their marriage “in uh kinda strain” (Hurston 43), but he didn't. She waited for Tea Cake to get better, but he couldn't. She waited for the medicine to arrive from Miami, but it didn't come in time to help Tea Cake, and it was doubtful that it could have anyway. So Janie will indeed probably continue to wait, content, perhaps even without knowing that she is so, to be just as infertile at the end of the novel as she was at the beginning.

Perhaps most ironic of all, however, is that Hurston undercuts her own character by short-circuiting her narration and thereby forbidding her the delivery of her own story. Is this the ultimate infertility? Janie returns to Eatonville pregnant with the urge to narrate—at least to her friend Pheoby. She begins that narration well enough, but, a first-person narrative quickly gives way to third person limited and omniscient points of view. Such perspectives as the following write over Janie's voice: “Long before the year was up, Janie noticed that her husband had stopped talking in rhymes to her” (Hurston 25). Others merely make Janie disappear.

Janie can relate her interactions with Nanny, but she lacks the ability to see what Nanny is doing once she leaves her; this short omniscient passage illustrates the point: “Nanny sent Janie along with a stern mien, but she dwindled all the rest of the day as she worked” (Hurston 23). Also, she cannot be inside Logan’s head and registering the discomfort Logan feels when Janie asks what he would do if she were to leave, but that is precisely what the narrative does, as in this passage: “He flopped over resentful in his agony and pretended sleep. He hoped that he had hurt her as she had hurt him” (Hurston 29). Nor is Janie in a position to relate how Tea Cake, as soon as Janie leaves to get the doctor after symptoms of his rabies manifest, gets up, scrubs the water bucket, refills it, and desperately tries to drink water after his infection has intensified:

As soon as she was well out of sight, Tea Cake got up and dumped the water bucket and washed it clean. Then he struggled to the irrigation pump and filled it again. He was not accusing Janie of malice and design. He was accusing her of carelessness. She ought to realize that water buckets needed washing like everything else. [. . .] He eased the bucket on the table and sat down to rest before taking a drink.

Finally he dipped up a drink. It was so good and cool! [. . .] The demon was there before him, strangling, killing him quickly. It was a great relief to expel the water from his mouth. He sprawled on the bed again and lay there shivering until Janie and the doctor arrived. (Hurston 166-167)

These are but a tiny number of the *many* instances in which Janie is pushed to the side or disappears completely from her so-called first-person narrative. Hurston’s authorial intrusion makes clear that Janie’s voice has literally been written over. Just as Jody determined that it was necessary for “somebody” to think “for women and chillun and chickens and cows” (Hurston 67), so Hurston thinks—and writes/narrates—for Janie. Hurston finally did not trust Janie any more than Jody or Tea Cake did near the ends of their lives. Although the narrative returns to Janie’s voice with Janie and Pheoby at the end, when Pheoby declares that she has grown ten feet by listening to Janie, there is little evidence in the novel that Janie contributes *directly, verbally*, to that growth; it is simply Hurston as author taking over. Instead of giving birth to a healthy narrative of her life, Janie merely attends the birthing, serving as a mere bystander to fertility rather than being the sole cause for it. We might

conclude, therefore, that the blossoming pear tree imagery was wasted on Janie Crawford Killicks Starks Woods, for she could never bring to fruition in her own life and life story what that sexuality and fertility meant.

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