

Ecological Landmarks in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*:

An Ecofeminist Reading

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Landmarks are visible, noticeable pieces of the landscape or architecture by which people understand their surroundings. Landmarks are inextricably grounded in or linked to the natural environment, whether the landmark is a memorable lakeside or a beautiful building suspended on the horizon. Landmarks direct people through otherwise unfamiliar territory. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Janie grounds her life's memories in various landmarks: the pear trees, the muck, the hurricane, and powerful animal characters. With these landmarks Zora Neale Hurston "maps" Janie and Tea Cake's relationship as ecologically exemplary and balanced as opposed to patriarchal and hierarchical, until Tea Cake violates the ecosystem by abusing Janie, bringing on himself the environmental judgement of the hurricane and rabies. Despite Tea Cake's transgression, Janie immortalizes the uncorrupted Tea Cake via the ecological concept of renewal with both her memories and the seeds he leaves behind. Janie is able to interpret and map her life uniquely as the novel is a retelling of the events that already happened, thereby immortalizing the goodness of Tea Cake in her continual recreation of their tragic love story.

This reading classifies as ecocriticism because of the characters' inherent tie to their surrounding ecosystems consisting of both human and non-human nature. The reading also classifies as feminist due the ways ecological principles of intersubjectivity translate to egalitarian male/female relationships, as well as the ways Tea Cake violates this intersubjectivity. Many critics have examined *Their Eyes Were Watching God* through

ecocritical as well as feminist lenses: Gurleen Grewal investigates the role of trees in Janie's sexual maturation and quest to liberation from male power. For Grewal, the pear trees are a vision that "blue print" (104) the perfect marriage, compelling Janie to seek the pear trees in search of true love. Ines Casas Maroto similarly explores the connection between the pear trees and Janie's marriages, arguing that the novel portrays Janie as continually trying to "bring her own experience into harmony with her initial vision of the pear tree" (72). Glenda B. Weathers compares all of the tree images, asserting they reveal the fullness of Janie's moral character. In a different vein, Brian R. Roberts examines the roles of animals within the text, arguing that Zora Neale Hurston employs powerful animal folk tales to signify important transitions in the novel. In the purely feminist camp, Tracy L. Bealer scrutinizes the actions of Janie's husbands as patriarchal, while Yvonne Mesa-El Ashmawi and Kersuze Simeon Jones provide a more moderate, gracious reading of Tea Cake's flaws and the reasons for them.

Salient ecological assumptions guide this reading. Ecology, while a scientific discipline, also refers to "thinking about nature as connected in an evolving and interactive way...ecology's etymological meaning [is] knowledge of the household, or shared habitat, of Earth in language ethically responsive to the diversity, connectedness, and well-being of Earth's offspring" as ecocritic Diane McColley explains. A properly functioning ecological system requires mutual submission from all parties, not a hierarchical submission-domination relationship. Each part of the system must consider the needs of the rest of the system, as the whole system is worth more than the sum of its parts. In human relationships, an anti-ecological hierarchy produces patriarchal domination of men over women as subject over object, a system that clearly does not benefit the whole of humanity. Intersubjectivity refers to an ecologically balanced male-female relationship characterized by mutual submission and equal care from and to both members of the

relationship, regardless of prescribed gender role (Bealer). This assumption guides this reading of Janie's marriages. Additionally, ecological systems tend toward balance; if one part of system is violated, many parts will direct energy towards the wound to bolster the party in need (Kimmerer 20). This concept importantly supports the reading of Tea Cake as receiving ecological judgment for violating his ecosystem with Janie. Finally, healthy ecosystems continually regenerate themselves, absorbing old matter and creating anew; they constantly both degenerate and recreate simultaneously, as Janie does with her memories of Tea Cake.

Meaningful natural imagery surfaces early on in Hurston's novel. When Janie begins recounting her story to her friend Phoeby, the narrator says, "Janie saw her life like a great tree in leaf with the things suffered, things enjoyed, things done and undone. Dawn and doom were in the branches" (8). Here Janie reveals one of her most important landmarks: trees. The way Janie describes her life as "a great tree in leaf" (8) directly contrasts with the way Janie describes her ailing Nanny (Janie's grandmother): "Nanny's head and face looked like the standing roots of some old tree that had been torn away by storm" (12). Nanny herself furthers the tree imagery when she's explaining the state of colored people to Janie: "You know, honey, us colored folks is branches without roots" (16). For Janie, Nanny represents the status quo of patriarchal relationships. Grewal's "'Beholding a Great Tree in Leaf': Eros, Nature, and the Visionary in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*" elucidates Nanny's perspective on patriarchal inevitability: "Nanny's experience of oppression, her lack of autonomy and safety, gives her a pragmatic and transactional view of marriage and a shriveled, gendered script distorted by fear and insecurity from which Janie must free herself" (104). Nanny's view of marriage continues to give power to the patriarchal structures of her culture according to Weathers: "Despite her hatred of it, however, Nanny complies with the social hierarchy that places black women beneath black men"

(203). Nanny complies with the system when she renders marriage as a transaction, evidenced when she tries to convince Janie to marry Killicks by describing his material wealth: his sixty acres and “de onliest organ in town” (22). Nanny submits to these powers when she insists that Janie marry Logan Killicks—essentially against her will—in hopes that Janie will be protected: “‘Tain’t Logal Killicks Ah wants you to have, baby, it’s protection” (15). For Maroto, “[Nanny] sees in marriage the potential for Janie to have both the protection and the respectability that neither she nor her disgraced daughter had...she is convinced that without the ‘protection’ of a male-owned home, her Janie will face a future of physical and spiritual destruction” (73). While Nanny genuinely believes that marrying Logan Killicks is best for Janie, Janie knows and believes differently because of what she witnessed under the pear tree, another significant landmark.

Janie closely observes nature and internalizes the systems and relationships she sees, forming for her an ecological vision for human interaction. Janie senses a spiritual pull to commune with nature: “She had been spending every minute that she could steal from her chores under that tree for the last three days. That was to say, ever since the first tiny bloom had opened. It had called her to come and gaze on a mystery” (10). This experience evidently engages four of her senses: sight, sound, smell, and touch: she “gazes” on the “mystery;” she hears a “flute song forgotten in another existence;” she smells that “the rose of the world was breathing out smell;” and she feels that “it followed her through all her waking moments and caressed her in her sleep” (10). Janie intimately knows her environment in an interconnected way, considering it with most of her senses. Her senses are heightened as she encounters the ecosystem of the pear tree for the first time. The story’s first occurrence of the pear tree is a beautiful description of a well-functioning ecosystem:

She was stretched on her back beneath the pear tree soaking in the alto chant of the visiting bees, the gold of the sun and the panting breath of the breeze when the inaudible voice of it all came to her. 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! (11).

Janie ostensibly witnesses the pollination of a flower, a biological process that scientists have delineated in sexual terms. The process of pollination requires the cooperation of various parties, with not one role being more important than another. There is no hierarchy in the exchange of pollination, only different roles. Tracy L. Bealer elucidates the ecological implications of this passage further: “the vision is persistently communal: a throng of ‘visiting bees’ meets the tree, and the single bee on which Janie focuses contacts multiple feminine ‘calyxes’ resulting in pleasure that engages the entire tree ‘from root to tiniest branch.’ The interaction is egalitarian” (314). Significantly, Janie sees this process and recognizes it as marriage, but not the marriage that Nanny tells her about. Nanny tells her of a transaction, not mutual submission and care. As Janie considers her experience, she conflates herself with the pear tree and asks, “Where were the singing bees for her?” but “Nothing on the place nor in her grandma’s house answered her” (13). As Moroto explains, “Janie’s awakening to romance and sexual desire constitutes a powerful antithesis to her grandmother Nanny’s metaphors of the black woman as the mule of the world and the spit-cup of men, with all their suggestion of dehumanization and sexual exploitation” (72). Weathers takes a similar view to Moroto, arguing that the pear tree challenges Nanny’s view of marriage: “Replete with the promise of fecundity, the pear tree argues against the tyranny of control that Nanny unwisely, perhaps unwittingly, chooses” (203). While Janie

knows from her pear tree experience that good relationships are intersubjective and mutually submissive, her marriage with Logan Killicks fails to meet the standards of an ecologically balanced relationship.

Janie has hope for her marriage to Killicks at the onset. As she considers what constitutes love, Janie reflects on her coming marriage to Killicks: “Did marriage end the cosmic loneliness of the unmated? Did marriage compel love like the sun day?” (21). Janie knows of an egalitarian relationship as represented in the pear tree, but she processes whether Killicks will offer her a similar balanced relationship: “In the few days to live before she went to Logan Killicks and his often-mentioned sixty-acres Janie asked inside of herself and out. She was back and forth to the pear tree continuously wondering and thinking” (21). In her naiveté, Janie hopes and resolves that “Yes, she would love Logan after they were married” (21). Unfortunately, Janie quickly realizes that Killicks does not mimic the pear tree. Shortly after the wedding, Janie returns to Nanny’s house to tell her she doesn’t love him yet, and Janie construes the inadequacy in light of the pear tree: “Ah wants things sweet wid mah marriage lak when you sit under a pear tree and think...” (24). Janie realizes that “marital relationships do not replicate the rhythmic and sacred patterns of the natural world” (Bealer 316). Nanny answers Janie’s dismay: “Youse young yet No tellin’ what mout happen befo’ you die. Wait a while, baby. Yo’ mind will change (24). For Nanny, love isn’t the most important part of marriage; the transaction is. Janie knows differently. She landmarks her waiting with the seasons and the tree imagery each season produces: she waits “a bloom time, and a green time and an orange time,” (25) and she hasn’t changed her mind.

Logan Killicks’ true colors really manifest after Nanny’s death. “Long before the first year was up” (26), the narrator tells the reader that Killicks had “stopped talking in rhymes to

her” (26). He had “ceased to wonder at her long black hair and finger it” (26). Further, Killicks starts ordering her around like hired help: “If Ah kin haul de wood heah and chop it fuh yuh, look lak you oughta be able tuh tote it inside. Mah fust wife never bothered me ’bout choppin’ no wood nohow... You done been spoilt rotten” (26). While he never beats Janie, his objectification of her evidences itself. Maroto elaborates on Killicks’ treatment of Janie: “Killicks acts like a slave master with his insults and threats of violence when Janie refuses to obey him” (74). Janie’s first recorded response to his verbal abuse reveals the transactional nature of their relationship: “Ah’m just as stiff as you is stout. If you can stand not to chop and tote wood Ah reckon you can stand not to git no dinner” (26). Rather than a marriage of equals who mutually consider the needs and strengths of each other as well as the ecosystem as a whole, Janie and Killicks withhold affection from each other and don’t share the labor with a good attitude. Their division of labor becomes a source of contention and passive aggression rather than productive conquering of different household spheres. Further, Killicks believes he treats Janie well: “Ah thought you would ’preciate good treatment. Thought Ah’d take and make something outa yuh” (30). Killicks objectifies Janie by thinking he should mold her into a proper wife with emotional abuse and forced labor, affirming the view of marriage Nanny perpetuated. For Janie, Killicks “desecrate[es] the pear tree” (14) with his verbal and emotional abuse that fails to exemplify the ecological principles of intersubjectivity and mutual care.

Janie’s hope for an egalitarian marriage derives directly from her relationship to and knowledge of nature, while Killicks’ objectification of Janie mirrors his utilitarian view of nature. As explored above, Janie looks to the pear tree for guidance on love and relationships, but she also displays intimacy with other natural phenomena. For example, after Nanny dies and Janie reflects on the state of her marriage, revealing a closeness to nature:

...she began to stand around the gate and expect things. What things? She didn't know exactly. Her breath was gusty and short. She knew things that nobody had ever told her. For instance, the words of the trees and the wind. She often spoke to falling seeds and said, "Ah hope you fall on soft ground," because she had heard seeds saying that to each other as they passed (25).

In feminist criticism, the patriarchy results in a hierarchy of man over woman, and, subsequently, culture over nature, in which men and culture and women and nature are conflated. Therefore, it is risky to argue that Janie is close to nature, but it actually benefits her character and is not an insult. Janie is close to nature in such a way that she exists within the ecosystem as a part of it and learning from it. She "knew" things from "the words of the wind" indicating she is a student of nature (Hurstun 25). Not only does she know nature, but she also communes with it when she speaks to falling seeds. It is no slight against Janie that she is close to nature; however, it is a slight against Killicks that he is far from it. While Killicks is physically close to nature as a farmer, he is far from nature in a communal sense; he objectifies nature the way he objectifies Janie. Grewal explicates this phenomenon: "With his 60 acres and a mule, Logan Killicks's relationship to nature is utilitarian, plodding, and deadly to the imagination as his last name suggests" (107). If Killicks communed with nature—rather than using it only for his benefit—perhaps he would see the ecological imbalance of his forceful authority over Janie.

Janie's marriage to Killicks does not last long, but her next husband isn't much better. Jody too is far from nature and actually embodies culture quite robustly, and he fails to attain Janie's vision of the pear tree with an ecologically balanced relationship. From the first time Janie sees Joe, he exemplifies the meaning of culture in the nature versus culture dichotomy. As Janie spots Joe coming down the road, she describes him as "a citified, stylish dressed man with

his hat set at an angle that didn't belong in these parts. His coat was over his arm, but he didn't need it to represent his clothes. The shirt with the silk sleeveholders was dazzling enough for the world" (27). Joe learned his culture from "workin' for white folks all his life" (28). Joe further reveals his distance from nature when Janie explains to him that her husband is away getting a mule so she can help plow: "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" (29). What Joe doesn't realize is that Janie actually desires to be close to nature; it's her community and teacher. At first, Joe's offer that "he would be a big ruler of things with her reaping the benefits" (29) seems like a welcome reprieve from the dominance of Logan Killicks. While Janie recognizes right away that Joe "did not represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees" (Hurstons 29), Joe does "[speak] for far horizon" (29) giving Janie hope that this marriage will more closely embody what she knows from nature.

Unfortunately, Joe's evasion of nature's principles and devotion to culture cause him to mistreat and appropriate Janie for his own benefit. Grewal highlights the tension between Joe's devotion to culture and Janie's propensity toward nature: "Joe Starks waited for Janie up ahead with 'a hired rig.' But the 'high ruling chair ' Joe Starks sat on is incompatible with flower dust" (107). Joe's plans for Janie actually mirror Killicks' attempt to "take and make somethin' outa [her]" (Hurstons 30). Grewal explains that "[Joe] wants to transform Janie into a house-wife. He wants to emulate the protocols of class and make her a lady" (107). Once Janie marries Joe, the reader realizes how concerned with authority and hierarchy Joe really is. As they enter the new town, Joe searches for the mayor and is incredulous to hear they don't have one: "I god, where's de Mayor?...Ah want tuh speak wid de Mayor...Ain't got no Mayor! Well, who tells y'all what to do?" (34-35). Weathers expounds upon this passage and Joe's desire for authority: "Hungering

for power and authority, Starks booms his entrance into the town...Hurston's spelling transforms his expletive into declaration: *I god*. Joe Starks's 'god' with its lowercase *g* and capital *M* essentially reduces god while raising the Mayor wannabe to new dominance" (204). Weathers further argues that "Starks covets the mayoral position, forges his authority from the subjection, fear, and awe of the citizens, and perpetuates his stronghold by parading his successes, one of which is Janie—ornament-wife, a notch on his sword" (204). Weathers' argument highlights the way Joe objectifies Janie as a wife by controlling her for his own image. Bealer contributes to the same discussion, pointing out that "Joe also insists that Janie conform to his idea of genteel femininity at the price of her ability to interact with the Eatonville residents" (317) as well as nature. Joe imposes on Janie's feminine presentation of herself for his own benefit when the store opens: "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...So she put on one of her bought dresses and went up the new-cut road all dressed in wine-colored red" (41). Early on, Janie enjoys the abundance and attention; however, Joe's treatment of her quickly devolves into overt ownership. Maroto supports Weathers' and Bealer's arguments: "Joe confines Janie...by limiting her life to the inside of his store and his white house, which resemble that of a slave master. He wanted Janie to sit on the pedestal—the black equivalent of the southern lady, beautiful, pure submissive—without the least concern for her individual wants and needs" (75). Bealer's quotation illuminates the ecological lack of Joe and Janie's relationship: Joe takes from Janie what he wants and needs without providing her what she wants and needs. Joe's evasion of Janie's needs reveals itself when Janie honestly tells Joe she's dissatisfied with the current state: "'You'se always off talkin' and fixin' things, and Ah feels lak Ih'm jus' markin' time. Hope it soon gets over.' 'Over Janie? I god, Ah ain't even started good.

Ah told you in de very first beginnin' dat Ah aimed tuh be uh big voice'" (46). As Weathers pointed out previously, Hurston again writes Joe saying "I god," associating him with overt power structures. When Janie vulnerably reveals her fears to Joe, he crushes her with his selfishness, leaving Janie with "A feeling of coldness and fear [that] took hold of her. She felt far away from things and lonely" (46). Their relationship continually devolves into object-subject ownership evidenced by Joe's insistence on Janie covering her hair in the store, which the reader learns from gossiping men: "Whut make her keep her head ties up lak some ole 'oman round de store? Nobody couldn't *git* me tuh tie no rag on mah head if Ah had hair lak dat" (49). The narrator later describes the impetus for Joe's requirement of the head covering: "one night [Joe] had caught Walter standing behind Janie and brushing the back of his hand back and forth across the loose end of her braid ever so lightly so as to enjoy the feel of it...That night he ordered Janie to tie up her hair around the store....She was there in the store for *him* to look at, not those others" (Hurston 55). Joe's interaction with Janie's head covering reveals his entitlement as her owner and authority. Joe does not consider the fact that "This business of the head-rag irked [Janie] endlessly" (55), he only cares about confining her for his own sense of superiority and ownership.

Hurston interestingly ties Joe's treatment of the head covering to the incident with Matt Bonner's mule, indicating a relationship between how Joe treats Janie and how he treats this mule. After the reader learns that Janie is in the store for Joe to look at, the narrator continues, "But he never said things like that. It just wasn't in him. Take the matter of the yellow mule, for instance" (Hurston 55). The narrator then launches into the drawn out story of the death of Matt Bonner's mule. At first, when the men tantalize the mule, both Janie and Joe appear to have

sympathy for the animal; however, the reader later learns that only Janie's sympathy was true. Janie, in her closeness to nature, truly despises the mistreatment of the mule:

Everybody was having fun at the mule-baiting. All but Janie.

She snatched her head away from the spectacle and began muttering to herself. "They oughta be shamed uh theyselves! Teasin' dat poor brute beast lak they id! Done been worked tuh death; done had his disposition ruint wid mistreatment, and now they got tuh finish devilin' 'im tuh death"...a little war of defense for helpless things was going on inside her (Hurstons 56-57).

Janie's sympathy for the mule reveals both her closeness to nature and her ability to identify with the mule. Sympathy for the "helpless things" of nature reminds the reader of when Janie spoke to the seeds, hoping they would fall on soft ground. Additionally, though, Janie identifies with the mule. Both her previous and current husband exploited her for labor and mistreated her due to their hierarchical rather than ecological approach to marriage and relationships. At first, it seems that Joe actually echoes Janie's sympathy for the mule by buying him off of Bonner, so the mule could rest (58). When the mule finally dies, the townspeople must drag him out of town for sanitation purposes, and they hold a mock funeral where they "mocked everything human in death" (60). Joe shows a blatant disrespect for the animal when he "stood on the distended belly of the mule for a platform and made gestures" (60). The mock funeral became absurdly funny to the point that "the sisters got mock-happy and shouted and had to be held up by the menfolks" (61). Weathers elucidates the powerful imagery of the mule funeral in its implications for Janie arguing that "Starks treats Janie as irreverently as he does the mule" (204) fulfilling Nanny's fear that Janie would be the mule of the world (Weathers 204). Joe's distance from and disrespect for

human and non-human nature manifests itself powerfully in his treatment of the mule, which mirrors his treatment of Janie.

After the death of the mule, Joe and Janie's relationship sharply declines; they could no longer contain their marital strife to their home, and they fight in the public sphere of the store. When Joe accuses Janie of misplacing a bill of lading, he insults her in front of the store: "'Dat's 'cause you need tellin',' he rejoined hotly. 'It would be pitiful if Ah didn't. Somebody got to think for women and chillum and chickens and cows. I god, they sho don't think non theirselves'" (71). Joe degrades Janie (and all women) by lumping her with children and animals in her inability to think. The seed of Joe's patriarchal mindset grows after this incident in the store, and his verbal abuse escalates into physical abuse: "he slapped her face in the kitchen...until she had a ringing around in her ears" because her dinner recipe flopped (71-72). As Bealer points out, "Joe's blows leaves a 'ringing sound in her ears.' Drowning out all other sound and forming an ugly inversion of the bees' 'alto chant'" (318). After he slaps her, "She wasn't petal open with him anymore" (71) and "she had no more blossomy openings dusting pollen over her man, neither any glistering young fruit where the petals used to be" (72) signifying that Janie continues to landmark her experiences with the natural imagery of the blossoming pear tree.

Interestingly, when Janie realizes she "wasn't petal open with [Joe] anymore" (71), she has a premonition that another man awaits to fulfill her pear tree dreams: "She was saving up feelings for some man she had never seen" (72). Vergible "Tea Cake" Woods strolls into Janie's life shortly after Joe dies and frees her from the bondage of their imbalanced marriage. Tea Cake's approach to Janie immediately counters Joe's patriarchal dominance when Tea Cake invites her to play checkers, an invitation that contrasts a scene earlier when Joe rudely addressed

Janie and ordered her to bring him the checkerboard so he could play with someone else: “‘You getting’ too moufy, Janie,’ Starks told her. “Go fetch me de checker-board *and* de checkers. Sam Wtson, you’se mah fish.’”(Hurston 76). While Janie and Tea Cake laugh together in the store, Tea Cake never critiques her for “mouthiness” and instead asks, “ ‘How about playin’ *you* some checkers? You looks hard tuh beat’” (Hurston 95). Even Hurston’s style choice to employ italics in these passages reveals the nature of the juxtaposition: Joe’s emphasized *and* highlights Joe’s exacting demands of Janie by adding to the orders he dispenses; conversely, Tea Cake’s emphasized *you* indicates that he is actually interested in Janie and having fun with her. By asking her to play checkers, Tea Cake invites Janie into a male space she was previously denied access to. Janie realizes the gravity of Tea Cake’s invitation: “[Janie] found herself glowing inside. Somebody wanted her to play. Somebody thought it natural for her to play. That was even nice” (95-96). Furthermore, Tea Cake and Janie actually have fun together: “They scrambled and upset the board and laughed at that” (96). Their shared fun in a previously male-dominated space equalizes them as peers and friends rather than maintaining the hierarchy previously inherent in the game of checkers. Further, as Bealer points out, “Tea Cake’s desire for mutual enjoyment through play recalls the ‘natural’ space of pleasure and satisfaction Janie discovered under the pear tree” (320). Janie remains insecure in some ways due to Joe’s abuse; however, Tea Cake slowly builds her back up, dismantling the hierarchy further: “‘Jody useter tell me Ah never would learn. It wuz too heavy fuh mah brains.’ ‘Folks is playin’ it wid sense and folks is playin’ it without. But you got good meat on yo’ head. You’ll learn’” (96). Janie draws directly on the conversation where Joe likened her to animals and children, yet Tea Cake challenges the notion that Janie lacks sense or intelligence, assigning her dignity as a subject rather than catering to Joe’s previous objectification. Even their initial friendship balances out the hierarchy Janie

experienced in her first two marriages. Tea Cake sees Janie as an equal who possesses inherent value and deserves friendship and affection.

As their relationship grows, countless indicators of an ecologically balanced relationship arise. Tea Cake shows up on Janie's porch with "a string of fresh-caught trout for a present" and suggests "Ah'll clean 'em, you fry 'em and let's eat" (103). Not only does he bring Janie a present—a token of affection the reader never sees with Logan or Joe—Tea Cake suggests a mutually beneficial way of enjoying the gift together. Tea Cake suggests a division of labor that plays to each person's strength and leaves no one in dominance over another. They equally share the fruits of their labor. Tea Cake does not seek to only gain from the relationship; he also gives. Similarly, Tea Cake gifts Janie with true affection. While Joe made Janie cover her hair, Tea Cake adores her hair, and she wakes up to him "combing her hair and scratching the dandruff from her scalp" (103). As she is only used to someone policing her appearance, Janie seems quite incredulous that anyone would take this sort of interest in her hair: "Why, Tea Cake? Whut good do combin' mah hair do *you*? It's *mah* comfortable, not yourn" (103). Tea Cake's reasoning reveals his inherent value of Janie: "It's mine too. Ah ain't been sleepin' so good for more'n uh week cause Ah been wishin' so bad tuh git mah hands in yo' hair. It's so pretty. It feels jus' lak underneath a dove's wing next to mah face" (103). Bealer comments on this passage as well: "Tea Cake does not value Janie's beauty for how it can benefit him in the sociopolitical realm, but for the sensory pleasure it affords him, and more importantly, Janie herself" (320). Unlike Joe, who polices Janie's hair in an attempt to own her, Tea Cake appreciates her hair, and physically engages it in a way that benefits them both rather than just himself. Tea Cake shows consideration of Janie's comfort and genuinely appreciates her beauty rather than objectifying it.

Tea Cake's confession of love for Janie further uncovers his inherent value for her as a person, rather than what she can do for him economically: "De thought uh mah youngness don't satisfy me lak yo' presence do" (105). Janie has trouble believing that Tea Cake really desires her this way, so Tea Cake truncates the conversation with a tree analogy: "Look lak we done run our conversation from grass roots tuh pine trees" (106). Tea Cake's invocation foreshadows his closeness to nature, which the novel reveals in detail in the coming chapters. After his confession of love, Janie can't stop thinking about him, and she also invokes the pear tree imagery: "He could be a bee to a blossom—a pear tree blossom in the spring" (106). Janie's tentativeness reflects the insecurity about her pear tree image her last two husbands have produced. After the official "beginning of things" (107), Tea Cake continues to display an egalitarian mindset towards Janie that mimics the pear tree imagery. When Tea Cake asks her to attend the picnic with him, Janie fears that he doesn't want to be seen with her; however, Tea Cake not only allays her fears, but he also encourages her to use her voice. "Naw, it ain't all right wid you. If it was you wouldn't be sayin' dat. Have de nerve tuh say what you mean" (109). Tea Cake invites Janie into honest conversation; he doesn't require her to clean up her speech to please him because he actually cares what she thinks, quite unlike Joe or Logan. Additionally, unlike Joe or Logan, Tea Cake does not confine Janie to any othered spaces, but he shares spaces with her. When a friend asks Janie about all the activities she does with Tea Cake, insinuating that he's not classy enough for her, Janie replies, "Jody classed me off. Ah didn't. Naw Pheoby, Tea cake ain't draggin' me off nowhere Ah don't want tuh go. Ah always want tuh git round uh whole heap, but Jody wouldn't 'low me tuh" (112). Janie and Tea Cake's relationship is characterized by mutual consent and therefore intersubjectivity. Janie actually desires to do these activities with Tea

Cake, and never does anything she doesn't want to do. Janie consents to follow Tea Cake to Jacksonville to get married and start over.

After some time in Jacksonville, Tea Cake suggests they go to the muck in the Everglades: "Oh down in de Everglades round Clewiston and Belle Glade where dey raise all dat cane and string-bean and tomatuhs. Folks don't do nothin' down dere but make money and fun and foolishness. We must go dere" (128). Tea Cake's suggestion hearkens back to Bealer's assertion about his inclination to have fun as well as reveals his desire to be close to nature. The narrator elucidates Janie's thoughts upon arriving in the Glades: "To Janie's strange eyes, everything in the Everglades was big and new. Big Lake Okechobee, big beans, big cane, big weeds, big everything...Ground so rich that everything went wild" (129). While Logan forced Janie to labor over nature, and Joe sectioned Janie off from nature, Janie feels free in the Everglades, evidenced by the bigness and wildness of it all. The Everglades and the muck, as another ecological landmark, embody the same fecundity of nature Janie saw in the pear tree. While in the Everglades, Tea Cake further reveals his closeness to nature and his love for Janie. His closeness to nature manifests itself in his bean planting and work on the muck. While he works on the muck, he begins to miss Janie during the day and comes home to see her, highlighting his true affection for her: "Janie, Ah gits lonesome out dere all day 'thout yuh" (133). Because he misses her, Tea Cake invites her to come work with him: "After dis, you betta come git uh job uh work out dere lak de rest uh de women—so Ah won't be losin' time comin' home" (133). Tea Cake's invitation is powerful. He invites her to share workspace with him among nature in contrast to her other two husbands who forced her to labor or prevented her from communing with nature. Janie accepts the invitation and "got ready to pick beans along with Tea Cake" the next morning (133). Janie and Tea Cake have fun working together, and

since they both spend the day working, “Tea Cake would help get supper afterwards” (133) indicating a balanced division of home labor.

While Janie and Tea Cake have some of their most enjoyable times together in Florida, the Everglades bring challenges to their balanced relationship. Both Tea Cake and Janie experience their first bouts of jealousy on the muck, and the respective ways they deal with their jealousy expose the depths of their character. Janie gets jealous first when “A little chunky girl took to picking a play out of Tea Cake in the fields and in the quarters” (137). One day Janie “rushed around into the cane and about the fifth row down she found Tea Cake and Nunkie struggling” (137). Janie intervenes and the girl runs away, leaving her and Tea Cake to talk it out. Tea Cake defends himself: “‘She grabbed mah workin’ tickets outa mah shirt pocket and Ah run tuh git ’em back,’ Tea Cake explained, showing the tickets considerably mauled about in the struggle” (137). At first, Janie doesn't believe him and accuses him of being unfaithful. Their fight evolves into a sexual encounter of reconciliation. Bealer examines the fight and sexual encounter, concluding that “The evolution of the physical fight into sexual reconnection physically enacts productive conflict negotiation between subjects” (322). Even though Tea Cake hurts Janie, she forgives him and reconnects with him physically to restore balance to the ecosystem, revealing her devotion to the greater good of their relationship rather than her own selfish desires.

Conversely, Tea Cake responds extremely poorly to his bout of jealousy. As Janie gets close to Mrs. Turner, Tea Cake overhears Mrs. Turner suggest that Janie consider a relationship with Mrs. Turner's brother. Then, Mrs. Turner actually brings her brother to the muck to meet Janie, and Tea Cake gets upset:

Tea Cake had a brainstorm. Before the week was over he had whipped Janie. 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 (146).

Tea Cake betrays their egalitarian relationship for a hierarchical one in which he is “boss” to selfishly assuage his own fears and insecurities. Bealer agrees that “Tea Cake’s reaction to the ‘awful fear’ that he will lose Janie leads him to enact the one hierarchical role in which his masculine power is secure” (322). Additionally, “Tea Cake’s violence temporarily transforms the structure of his marriage from work and play between equals to domination by a male ‘boss’” (Bealer 322). Tea Cake’s jealousy causes him to transgress his and Janie’s ecosystem by beating her to display ownership. Further, Tea Cake explains to his friends that he beat Janie to make a public point: “Ah didn’t whup Janie ’cause *she* done nothin’. Ah beat her tuh show dem Turners who is boss” (148). Effectively, Tea Cake exploits Janie to prop himself up in front of people who make him feel small. He betrays Janie and her love for him when he uses her this way. Similarly to Logan, Tea Cake effectively desecrates the pear tree he was previously emulating. Tea Cake wounded his previously well-functioning ecosystem; therefore, nature sought to rebalance what Tea Cake beat askew.

Janie’s jealousy balanced out with the equalizing intimacy of sexual intercourse. Since Tea Cake’s jealousy escalated the wound of the ecosystem, something greater had to bring balance back to the relationship. The hurricane and the rabid dog effectively balances out Tea Cake and Janie’s relationship by punishing Tea Cake for his transgression against the ecosystem. When people warn Tea Cake of the hurricane, his arrogance and desire for money prevent him from listening to nature’s cues (155-156). He and Janie stay, and the hurricane comes full force.

Hurston poignantly personifies the hurricane: “A big burst of thunder and lightning that trampled over the house...And the lake got madder and madder with only its dikes between them and him” (158-159). The thunder and the lake are angry at Tea Cake for violating the ecosystem in his betrayal of Janie. “The wind came back with triple fury” (160) finally signifying to Tea Cake that they were in danger. As they run from the lake, the rising waters echo the judgement in the story of Noah’s Ark: “And the lake. Under its multiplied roar could be hear a mighty sound of grinding rock and timber and a wail” (161) until “He seized hold of his dikes and ran forward until he met the quarters; uprooted them like grass and rushed on after his suppose-to-be conquerors, rolling the dikes, rolling the houses, rolling the people in the houses along with other timbers. The sea was walking the earth with a heavy heel” (161-162). Janie and Tea Cake are caught in the water then the rabid dog presents itself. It tries to bite Janie but “Tea Cake rose out of the water at the cow’s rump and seized the dog by the neck. But he was a powerful dog and Tea Cake was over-tired. So he didn’t kill the dog with one stroke as he had intended...They fought and somehow he managed to bite Tea Cake high up on his cheek-bone” (166). After the excitement of the hurricane, we learn that the dog was rabid and infected Tea Cake. Rabies is an interesting biological phenomenon to consider, for it corrupts that which is inherently good. While the dog is corrupted by rabies, Tea Cake was corrupted by jealousy, which caused him to betray his ecosystem. Hurston conflates Tea Cake and the rabid dog when the dog infects Tea Cake to highlight Tea Cake’s corruption. Bealer humorously calls this choice of Hurston’s a “*canis ex machina* to dispose of Tea Cake” (323). Tea Cake eventually dies as a result of his infection when Janie kills him defender herself from his rabid insanity.

While Tea Cake betrays his and Janie’s ecosystem resulting in ecological judgement, Janie immortalizes Tea Cake in her memories, the only place where he is not corrupted. It’s

important to note here that the entirety of the novel is Janie's retelling of this story. Considering the ecological principle of regeneration, Janie's memories continually recreate the most beautiful parts of Tea Cake. This process begins after Janie shoots Tea Cake, and she holds him in her arms weeping: "Janie held his head tightly to her breast and wept and thanked him wordlessly for giving her the change for loving service" (184). When Janie returns to their house, she finds seeds Tea Cake intended to plant: "The seeds reminded Janie of Tea Cake more than anything else because he was always planting things...Now that she was home, she meant to plant them for remembrance" (191). Tea Cake's propensity to plant resulted from his initial closeness to nature, which resembled his egalitarian relationship with Janie. By planting these seeds, Janie intends to both remember and recreate the best parts of Tea Cake. Bealer suggests that because Tea Cake was corrupted, "[Janie's] mind is in fact the *only* place where such a love can endure" (323). Grewal adds to the discussion when she asserts that "The novel does not end with the sorrow of Tea Cake's death" (110) for Janie says "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 picture of love and light against the wall" (193). Tea Cake is so immortalized that thoughts of him fill Janie's bedroom (191) even though they never lived in that home together. Bealer argues that "Janie...excises the unpleasant aspects of Tea Cake and only retains the version of her husband that reflects the pear-tree vision" (324). Ecologically speaking, death always brings new life. Janie's story is a cycle of growth "with dawn and doom in the branches" (8) that ends in the perfect balance of the horizon, for Tea Cake lives on in both her memories and her seeds.

The novel exists as a poignant retelling of the Janie and Tea Cake love story. Janie maps her life with the ecological landmarks to retroactively describe her relationship with Tea Cake. Janie's pear trees guide her from exploitive and abusive situations until she finds the one with

whom she can coexist in ecological and egalitarian balance. Animals in this story also stand as landmarks, albeit more somber ones. Logan's mule and Matt Bonner's mule reflect Nanny's sobering words from the first pages of the story, and the mules represent Janie in her early marriages, which were characterized by patriarchal hierarchy and exploitation. The rabid dog represents Tea Cake's corrupted nature, and the hurricane presides in judgment over Tea Cake's ecological transgression. Since judgement was served to Tea Cake in his infection and death, Janie is free to immortalize the best parts of him in both her seeds and her memories. Janie, as a person who is close to and communes with nature, employs these landmarks to guide, understand, and recreate her time with Tea Cake.

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