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## Self-Realization in a Restricted World: Janie's Early Discovery in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

DeLisa D. Hawkes

Zora Neale Hurston once said, "The game of keeping what one has is never so exciting as the game of getting" (828). In her article entitled, "How It Feels to be Colored Me," Hurston argues that her skin color never posed any hindrances for her opportunities to succeed in life. In fact, it was only "when [she was] thrown against a sharp white background" that she would "feel most colored" (828). If the context of race was taken away from this article, one could argue that "the game of getting" could also apply to the then-viewed infirmity of being female. At the same time African-Americans battled racism, women battled sexism. African-American women, therefore, fought two battles simultaneously.

The battle fought against sexism included being deprived of self-realization and self-affirmation, or a realization of one's dreams and desires and a positive value placed upon them. The African-American community of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century set aside self-realization and self-affirmation for African-American women by restricting them through male dominance and male dominated values. Restrictions included control over the fate of African-American women's marriages by their parents in hopes of opportunities for social advancement and from fear of sexual assault by white men. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham's definition of the "politics of respectability" best describes the aspirations of African-American women's acceptance of these restrictions in her work *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (1994). Referring to African American's "promotion of temperance, cleanliness, property, thrift, polite manners, and sexual purity," the politics of respectability was part of what Paisley Harris calls "uplift politics" (Harris 213). "African American women were particularly likely to use respectability and to be judged by it" by members within their community in order to undermine the scientific claims of the racial superiority of whites. African-American women, therefore, mothered their race's reputation in how they carried themselves. "By linking worthiness for respect to sexual propriety, behavioral decorum, and neatness, respectability served a gatekeeping function, establishing a behavioral 'entrance fee,' to the right to respect and the right to full citizenship" (213). Further, according to Harris, respectability progressed out of the Women's Convention of the Black Baptist Church which consisted of mostly working class women (213). Thus the politics of respectability, while establishing moral differences, also established class differences within the African-American community. Janie's story in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) exemplifies the restraints African-American women faced at the expense of their personal happiness and desires during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. For instance, Janie's grandmother, Nanny, arranges Janie's first marriage in hopes of an opportunity for social advancement and to protect Janie from the threats of sexual assault following with the goals of the politics of respectability. Entering into the marriage planned by Nanny is not a part of Janie's desires, and this event leaves space to wonder about Janie's vision of herself in a world that seeks to dominate and restrict her—even beyond her experience of self under the pear tree.

Ken Silber's article, "An African-American Woman's Journey of Self Discovery in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," poses the question of what a woman of color needs to achieve self-realization in a world dominated by male attempts to restrict her (281). One could also pose the question of what a woman of color needs to achieve self-realization in a world dominated by elder female enforcement (i.e. Nanny's support) of male dominated values. More importantly, how long does it take for a woman of color to gain this self-realization? When has she reached her breaking point of remaining out of touch with her own desires and aspirations? Furthermore, are all women of color the same, or do all women of color wish to follow the politics of respectability?

Silber argues that Janie does not gain self-actualization until *after* Tea Cake's death (280). However, through a deeper analysis of symbols and relationships in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, clearly Janie gains self-actualization not after Tea Cake's death, but *before* she begins a relationship with him as a result of incremental growth which she first experiences under the pear tree. Instead, her relationship with Tea Cake marks the moment when she gets to live out the 'self' she knew existed deep inside of her even during her previous unhappy relationships. Janie's self-defense against Tea Cake, which results in his death, is not the most important event in her journey to self-realization; it is only a part of the journey. This view changes the popular take on Tea Cake as a savior to Janie's self-realization and shifts the weight of her newfound identity to a culmination of her experiences and previous relationships, with specific attention to her earlier actions of leaving Logan Killicks for Joe Starks and speaking out to Starks on his deathbed. In the words of the novel's author, where "[t]he game of keeping what one has is never so exciting as the game of getting," Janie "got" herself years before she was faced with the heartbreaking duty to her 'self' of having to defend herself against Tea Cake.

Many scholars contend that Tea Cake represents the savior to Janie's self-affirmation. Sharon Jones argues this point, quoting Hurston's word choice in describing Tea Cake as "a glance from God" in direct contrast to Joe Starks, who sees himself as a god. Jones argues that Starks's use of the phrase "I, God" to really mean "My, God" or "By, God" illustrates this contrast (196). William Nash views Tea Cake as a character who "breaks the formerly suffocating heroine out of a lifeless life and reawakens her" (75). Tea Cake is also "bound less by conventional morality than by a devotion to pleasure and aesthetic satisfaction (75). While Jones and Nash argue for Tea Cake's morality, Janice Knudsen feels that 'Janie's ultimate evolution of self is only possible because of the strong, healthy relationship she shares with Tea Cake, which fosters the self-worth necessary for full self-realization' (Ashmawi 203). However, these arguments disregard Janie's own choices prior to meeting Tea Cake and even choices made while with Tea Cake. If Tea Cake is such a "savior," then why must Janie act in self-defense to end his life in order to save herself? Janie, then, is her *own* savior, and her salvation is a result of incremental growth.

Janie's relationships prior to meeting Tea Cake place her on the road to self-realization before she even knows Tea Cake exists. Additionally, these relationships do not just include men. Each relationship and noteworthy event in Janie's life provide her with a new lesson learned about her 'self' and what *she* wants. It is clear how Janie's marital relationships influence her through male dominance; these men live out the tradition of treating women as property and not as equals. However, Janie also faces *female* enforcement of male dominance by Nanny and later by women in Eatonville.

Diana Miles argues in *Women, Violence, & Testimony in the Works of Zora Neale Hurston* that *Their Eyes Was Watching God* “interrogates the patriarchal social system that condones the use of violence as a way of maintaining control over women” (42). I would add that the novel also examines the use of financial security to control women. Miles identifies three traumas that Janie endures in the relationships she has with men, which allow her to define her identity. These include, first, “a marriage that forces her to make herself sexually available to a man whom she doesn’t love;” second, “a marriage where she is silent and powerless;” and third, “a marriage with physical abuse that suggests in order to experience love a man must take ownership of you” (55). Miles does not, however, address the traumatic thinking of Nanny and its effects on Janie beyond the fact that Nanny’s experiences as a slave transform her goals for Janie (56). Nanny’s opinions on marriage are based not only on physical security, but also on the financial security necessary to enter into a higher social class. Therefore, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century notion of the politics of respectability fits Nanny’s understanding of proper womanhood; however, Janie is not an ex-slave and has not experienced a past filled with racial sexual violence.

Nanny prioritizes physical and financial security over love through the enforcement and practice of African-American male dominance in order to protect Janie from sexual assault by white men and low-class womanhood. Lorraine Bethel argues that the “domestic pedestal” provided by the politics of respectability is the only form of protection (15). Nanny restricts Janie based on her own past sexual assault through white male dominance, or in other words, rape by her master. As a former slave, Nanny has big dreams for Janie to thrive in property and prosperity—things not formerly available to Nanny in her younger years because of her social status as a slave. Nanny was used as a bed wench for her master during the days of slavery, and she does not want the same disregard for the preciousness of Janie’s womanhood to happen as it did to her and her daughter, Leafy. Nanny attempts to insure a better life for Janie by arranging her to marry Logan Killicks, a drastically older, yet wealthy and stable man. Davida Pines argues that “In the aftermath of slavery, marrying, like voting, demonstrated newly won freedom, citizenship, and equality; marriage confirmed and showcased black civility and morality within a racist society” (76). In Nanny’s eyes, gaining these characteristics of equality and higher social status can only be achieved by giving up personal desire and dreams in order to marry someone compatible with this vision of freedom and civility. Nanny tells Janie, “Ah was born back due in slavery so it wasn’t for me to fulfill my dreams of whut a woman oughta be and to do . . . Ah didn’t want to be used for a work-ox and a brood-sow and Ah didn’t want my daughter used that way neither” (Hurston 16). Nanny tells Janie that in slavery days she could not be “whut a woman oughta be” because of the constraints of the “peculiar institution.” Nanny was not allowed to be viewed as precious and pure; instead, she was simply a breeder for more slaves and a sexual release for her master. Nanny’s language suggests her acceptance of how things were and her acknowledgement that Janie’s time in history is different. Since slavery is over, Janie needs to seek marriage in order to become a respectable lady of high societal values. The passage speaks from Nanny’s experiences and assigns the task of fulfilling womanhood to Janie based on Nanny’s aspirations when she was a young woman.

Nanny feels that what women need is to seek advantages that can be used to keep a woman’s dignity and domesticity; this includes marriage to a respectable and well-known African-American man of substance and property. Nanny tells Janie, “If you don’t want him,

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" (23). This passage illustrates Killicks's notoriety in the community based on his property. His possession of the only "organ in town" is steeped in symbolism, representing life through a biological necessity. The organ suggests that his wealth is a key factor in keeping the town alive and a necessity for the life of the community. Without organs a body, for example, could not survive. The "organ" also represents a male phallic authority, as Killicks is one of the most powerful men in the community—the only owner of the most male power in town. In the eyes of Nanny, without property ownership and a strong marriage with a man like Killicks, a young woman cannot survive.

The image of "de big road" suggests that Killicks is a vessel for "going places" or social mobility. "De big road" would have been well-traveled and well-kept, and it probably led to a major town or city. Killicks' location in relation to the big road suggests that Janie has an opportunity to blossom as a woman of high-society, familiar with the urban ways of life. The couple would have lived on a small dirt road if Hurston was not trying to represent this characteristic of Killicks.

Upon finding Janie kissing Johnny Taylor, a possible release of personal desire for Janie, Nanny vows to marry off her granddaughter as soon as possible to the wealthy, yet starkly older, Logan Killicks in accordance with his property ownership. Nanny views Johnny Taylor simply as a man who will use Janie for his physical pleasures, then leave her like Nanny and her daughter were left by the men with whom they were involved. In her defense of marrying Janie off to Killicks, Nanny says,

"'Tain't Logan Killicks Ah wants you to have, baby, it's protection. Ah ain't getting' ole, honey. Ah'm *done* ole... Mah daily prayer now is tuh let dese golden moments rolls on a few days longer till Ah see you safe in life...You ain't got nobody but me. Neither can you stand alone by yo'self. De thought uh you bein' kicked around from pillar tuh post is uh hurtin' thing." (15)

This passage shows the importance of creating a suitable stake in society based on the African-American women's history of victimization by physical abuse. Nanny's tone is one of concern and tiredness as she is using her last days to secure a spot in higher society for Janie; again, she is living out her own past ambitions through the life of her granddaughter. Likewise, the politics of respectability lives out of the civility of the African-American community through its women. The quote "neither can you stand alone by yo'self" shows Nanny's male dominated thinking that a woman cannot survive without the support of a man in lieu of the threat of racial sexual abuse and the absence of a breadwinner. Nanny's male dominated views toward marriage and love lock women in a cage of dependence and incapability. The following conversation occurs between Nanny and Janie in reference to the absence of love within the marriage between Janie and Killicks; Janie complains:

"... you told me Ah mus gointer love him, and, and Ah don't. Maybe if somebody was to tell me how, Ah could do it."

And Nanny responds:

“You come heah wid yo’ mouf full uh foolishness on uh busy day. Heah you got uh prop tuh lean on all yo’ bawn days, and big protection, and everybody got tuh tip dey hat tuh you and call you Mis’ Killicks, and you come worryin’ me ‘bout love... If you don’t want him, 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 . . . Lawd have mussy! Dat’s de very prong all us black women gits hung on. Dis love!” (23)

According to Nanny’s beliefs, Killicks’s suitability for marriage is based on his land, luxuries, and mule, all of which possess the potential to provide Janie with the protection she needs for her womanhood and financial security after Nanny dies. Nanny wants Janie to focus on protection and not foolish fantasies of romance. The statement “Dat’s de very prong all us black women gits hung on. Dis love!” suggests that love is the emotion that keeps African-American women in the lower social status. Only marriage and wealth accomplishes a higher status in society.

Pines also argues that love is equal to the political well-being of African-American women of the time (77). However, from the analysis of Nanny it seems that love remains secondary, not equal, to uplifting the African-American female’s social status. The quote, “heah you got uh prop tuh lean on all yo’ bawn days, and big protection, and everybody got tuh tip dey hat tuh you and call you Mis’ Killicks, and you come worryin’ me ‘bout love” alludes to Nanny’s view of love as secondary to marriage and the institution’s advancement opportunities to a higher social status. Love is a hindrance. Being a former slave, Nanny pushes for Janie to marry an established man who can provide for her during his life and well after his death—to gain freedom comparative to white women socially and via citizenship and equality. Within the home, however, she must remain submissive. Love may develop over time, but it is not guaranteed and nor is it a necessity in Nanny’s view of marriage. A prioritized woman worries about physical and financial protection before love and romance, according to Nanny’s beliefs.

Nanny also upholds male dominance by promoting the salvific wish, which according to Candice Jenkins calls for “self-control or self-denial” of female sexual desires in order to achieve middle class status through its adopted values (14). This includes the denial of both experiencing and expressing sexual desire (17). Had Janie never had to suppress her desires, she may never have had to go on a journey for self-realization, and her experiences in her relationships would have led to another type of journey. Under the wrath of Nanny, Janie is introduced to the salvific wish when she explores her sexuality under the pear tree. Nanny yells,

‘Janie!’

The old woman’s voice was so lacking in command and reproof, so full of crumbling dissolution, — that Janie half believed that Nanny had not seen her. So she extended herself outside her dream and went inside of the house. That was the end of her childhood... [Nanny’s] eyes didn’t bore and pierce. They diffused and melted Janie, the room and the world into one comprehension. (Hurst 12)

This passage evokes a tone of anger and disgust. The look in Nanny's eyes, which "diffused and melted Janie," exemplifies her disapproval and disgust of Janie's exploration of her body. Additionally, the fact that this diffusion and melting occurs to Janie suggests that the disapproval destroys Janie, or her 'self.' Virtuous women suppress these desires in order to sit on the pedestal of morally righteous women. In accordance with the salvific wish, Janie should have experienced those feelings only with a husband, and this is why Nanny decides to marry her off right away. Nanny's repugnance in this passage suggests that she sees Janie becoming a woman of ill-repute who seeks sexual pleasure and not the best opportunities available—the very type of woman she is trying to prevent Janie from becoming. By this point, Janie has no female support for independence due to the fact that Nanny enforces male dominance in order to ensure social well-being. This results in a relentless, adventure-seeking spirit in Janie, though Killicks and Starks try to kill this spirit in Janie in various ways.

Entering into an arranged marriage with Killicks, Janie experiences unhappiness from the beginning. Additionally, Killicks does not conjure any feelings of desire or love in Janie, although Nanny suggests earlier that those feelings may develop. For Killicks, Janie is merely an asset to his farm who can help him in gaining more wealth. Killicks restricts Janie by defining them as members of the "aspiring class," which "while not members of the black economic elite nonetheless sought class mobility through hard work and sacrifice" (Jenkins 14). The following conversation occurs between Killicks and Janie:

"Looka heah, LilBit, help me out some. Cut up dese seed taters fuh me. Ah got tuh step off a piece," said Killicks.

"Where you goin'?" said Janie.

"Over tuh Lake City tuh see uh man about uh mule."

"Whut you need two mules fuh? Lessen you aims to swap off dis one?"

"Naw, Ah needs two mules dis yeah. Taters is goin' tuh be taters in de fall. Bringin' big prices. Ah aims tuh run two plows, and dis man Ah', talkin' 'bout is got uh mule all gentled up so even uh woman kin handle 'im." (Hurst 27)

The hard work of running a mule places Janie in the position of the "aspiring class," while at the same time the image challenges the highly regarded domestic life Nanny has in mind for her granddaughter. Nowhere in the passage does Janie volunteer to help Killicks with the plowing; he simply volunteers her services since she is *his property*. Therefore, while Janie secures protection from the evils of a racist and sexist world by marrying a man with property, Killicks secures dominance over another human being. In so many ways, Janie pays for her protection by almost giving up her own desires and aspirations, even to the point of giving up dreams of true love. Killicks does not take her to Lake City as the image of "de big road" suggests. Instead, Janie becomes merely a mule driver in Killicks' collection of property.

Marriage to Killicks adds to the spark of self-actualization in Janie. As mentioned earlier, it is not when Janie meets Tea Cake that she gains self-actualization, but much

earlier due to the relationships she has with Nanny, Killicks, and then Starks. Upon knowing that she is arranged to marry Killicks, Janie acts on the fact and “self-realizes” that she wants more. She gains the self-realization necessary to know what she is worth and what her desires are. This explains why Janie rejects the beliefs and practices of Nanny and Killicks once she meets Joe Starks—a man who upon first glance seems to be everything Janie wants in a marriage based on passion, love, and desire. Once Janie crosses the confining “big road” she lives on with Killicks in order to be with Starks, she begins to fulfill her own personal desires and realizes what it will take to complete *her*. Starks “did not represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees, but he spoke for far horizon” (29). Crossing the horizon is Janie’s completion of ‘self.’

Even though Janie realizes what she deserves in a marriage and thinks she sees this in Starks, Starks also attempts to subject Janie to his dominance both in life and in death by keeping her silent and removed from the community. However, Janie rejects his dominance in both circumstances. She finds her voice while Starks is living when she speaks out to him both on the porch of his store and on his death bed. For instance, when Starks faces death on his sick bed, Janie says, “All dis bowin’ down, all dis obedience under yo’ voice—dat ain’t whut Ah rushed off down de road tuh find out about you” (87). This passage shows that Janie realizes her ‘self’ before running off with Starks. What, in fact, she leaves with him for is to fulfill her own dreams of what love is and to get away from the male dominance of Killicks.

In death, the ghost of Starks’s dominance does not completely leave Janie’s world since the citizens of Eatonville expect her to remain faithful to his memory; in other words, the town adheres to the male dominated thinking process. However, after Starks dies, Janie continues being “self-actualized” when she rejects men in the town who wish to pursue her and who do not fulfill her aspirations. And yet the townspeople, succumbing to male dominance, think that Janie’s seclusion is based on her mourning over Starks.

“Taint dat Ah worries over Joe’s death, Phoeby. Ah jus’ loves dis freedom.”

“Sh-sh-sh! Don’t let people hear you say that, Janie. Folks will say you ain’t sorry he’s gone.” (93)

Janie shows no mourning over Starks’s death. Having gained self-actualization for some time now, Janie says, “Ah jus’ loves dis freedom.” Freedom is what Janie realizes should be a part of her life—the freedom to love unconditionally and equally. This conversation between Janie and Phoeby proves that Janie gains self-realization and self-actualization compared to Phoeby, who remains content in the mindset of living under male dominance. “Sh-sh-sh! Don’t let people hear you say that” reveals that Phoeby, along with other female members of Eatonville, put their own opinions and emotions on the backburner in order to save the reputation of their male partners.

Janie’s frustration with the male dominated mindset of Eatonville urges her to, again, take actions toward her own happiness. Upon meeting Tea Cake, Janie prepares to fulfill her own desires; however, some scholars continue to remember Starks as a martyr in the creation of self-realization in Janie. Houston Baker argues “[Nanny] is unequivocally correct in her judgment that only property [matters]...Starks’s property...enables Janie’s freedom [to move to the muck]. The lyrical pleasures associated with Tea Cake are merely



‘a derivative benefit’ of having worked so hard for Starks” (Tratner 173). This argument proves debatable because when Janie leaves Killicks in pursuit of her own pleasures she does rely on financial security from his estate. Coincidentally, Starks’s estate places Janie at a safer position to leave Eatonville, but his money does not fund her adventure of living for herself with Tea Cake, and she has sought adventure while penniless once before.

Tea Cake is not a savior for Janie but, rather, the vehicle through which she assumes full bloom of her self-affirming beliefs. Missy Kubitschek argues that Janie and Tea Cake’s relationship rejects ordinary conceptions of dominant and subordinate sex roles (25). This argument fits perfectly with the notion of Janie having already self-realized and self-actualized since it suggests equality. Tea Cake is her companion, then, not her master or mentor (25). In fact, the following passage demonstrates Janie’s feeling of equality and self-realization after finding Tea Cake and another woman together.

[Janie] walked slowly and thoughtfully to the quarters. It wasn’t long before Tea Cake found her there and tried to talk. She cut him short with a blow and they fought from one room to the other, Janie trying to beat him, and Tea Cake kept holding her wrists and wherever he could to mind her from going far. (Hurston 137)

While violence traditionally illustrates male dominance, the violent scenes between Janie and Tea Cake do not function in this light. Janie’s control over the physical altercation shows the equality she feels in the relationship as well as the strength she feels within herself. Tea Cake’s action in holding her wrists balances out the fight as he is not beating her but expressing equal control over the situation. Neither manhandles the other, even though this claim works only in Janie and Tea Cake’s private lives and they remain open to judgment from a patriarchal society. Tea Cake constantly feels the need to claim his manhood through the violence which occurs between him and Janie.

When Mrs. Turner’s brother came and she brought him over to be introduced, 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 . . . The way he petted and pampered her as if those two or three face slaps had nearly killed her made the women see visions and the helpless was she hung on him made men dream dreams. (147)

In maintaining an image of manhood to control his fears of losing his manhood, Tea Cake must promote the ideals of male dominance publically even if he does not agree with them. Tea Cake tells the other men on the muck,

“Janie is wherever Ah wants tuh be. Dats’s de kind uh wife she is and Ah love her for it. Ah wouldn’t be knockin’ her around. Ah didn’t wants whup her last night, but ol’ Mis’ Turner done sent for her brother tuh come tuh bait Janie in and take her away from me. Ah didn’t whup Janie ‘cause she done nothin’. Ah beat her tuh show dem Turners who is boss.” (148)

However, Tea Cake does not “beat” Janie outright. The encounter is a fight which gives both Janie and Tea Cake and equal physical power within the encounter. The same is true in her self-defense over the rabid Tea Cake which leads to his death. While Janie protects herself with the rifle from Tea Cake, who staggers with the pistol, the image mocks a power struggle, and “The pistol and the rifle rang out almost together,” killing Tea Cake. The fact that both guns, weapons used to conquer another person, fire at the same time represents equal opportunities for power over the other. However, Tea Cake’s death represents Janie’s, or African-American women’s, claim to self-actualization and self-ownership. The trial scene in the wake of Tea Cake’s death speaks to the moment’s extension to not only Janie, but also to the African-American community. Hurston writes here: “Then [Janie] saw all of the colored people standing up in the back of the courtroom . . . They were all against her . . . The white part of the room got calmer the more serious it got, but a tongue storm struck the Negroes like wind among palm trees” (185-186). The African-American spectators’ quickness to speak against Janie’s self-defense symbolizes the African American community’s support and promotion of the “politics of respectability.” Janie’s, or early 20<sup>th</sup> century African American women’s, following of the politics of respectability determines the success of the community’s image of civility. Thus Janie’s actions result in death and a bad reputation for the community, according to her peers. However, Janie represents a positive reformation of selfhood for the 20<sup>th</sup> century African-American women—the power to take ownership over oneself, free from the constraints of a racist and patriarchal society.

Janie completes her self-realization once she is with Tea Cake, when she has the freedom to realize equality. The location of their relationship, the muck, includes two significant symbols of freedom. First, nowhere in the muck are there images of gates; there are only roads. Lorraine Bethel argues that gates in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* represent Janie’s confinement (13). Janie crosses gates and confinement when she kisses Johnny Taylor at Nanny’s, when she walks out of the gate to be with Starks at Killicks’s farm, and when she moves to the muck with Tea Cake. The muck is a completely free land. Second, the muck is fertile. The symbolism of fertile land represents Janie’s completion of self-affirmation with Tea Cake. He transforms into her pear, which is only possible with the utilization of fertile land.

Hurston uses the image of the tree throughout Janie’s relationships to show the progression of Janie’s self-realization and affirmation. In her marriage to Killicks, the tree is a stump with no fruit or foliage. In her marriage to Starks, the tree is a strong oak, which does not bear fruit. The difference between the two is that Janie is placed into her marriage with Killicks; there is nothing about that marriage which Janie desires. However, with Starks Janie receives some type of living plant, although the plant is not fruit bearing since Starks treats her as a subordinate. However, Janie makes the choice to run off with him. The muck, where she lives with Tea Cake, provides the fertile soil for a blooming Janie.

Janie’s consistent progression to ‘self’ disproves the claim that Janie gains self-affirmation only after Tea Cake’s death. She makes this journey long before meeting Tea Cake, who helps her blossom by adding more knowledge about her ‘self,’ but he does not orchestrate her discovery.

[Tea Cake’s death] was the meanest moment of eternity. A minute before she was just a scared human being fighting for its life. Now she was her sacrificing self with Tea Cake’s head in her lap. She had wanted him to live so

much and he was dead . . . Janie held his head tightly to her breast and wept and thanked him wordlessly for giving her the chance for loving service. (Hurston 184)

Janie's action of killing Tea Cake shows that she gains even more appreciation of herself given the fact that she loves him but places value in her relationship with *Janie* over all others. Her domesticity is not challenged by her freedom and the equality she has with Tea Cake, as the passage mentions she still considers herself serving him. However, she also serves herself in their relationship, so Tea Cake gives Janie a chance to serve herself.

To argue that Janie does not gain self-actualization until *after* Tea Cake's death pays insufficient attention to the symbols and significance of Janie's previous relationships. Janie gains self-actualization not only after Tea Cake's death, but *before* she is with him. Tea Cake represents the culmination of her discovery. Janie's self-defense against Tea Cake is not the most important event in her journey to self-realization; it is only a part of the journey. Janie expresses her self-affirmation first, by leaving Killicks; second, by going against the male dominated wishes of Eatonville; and last, by placing herself in an equal position with a man in an on-the-surface violent situation. This view changes the popular view of Tea Cake as a savior to Janie's self-realization and shifts the weight of her newfound identity to a culmination of her experiences and previous relationships.

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