

Recent Scholarship on Zora Neale Hurston's Novel

Their Eyes Were Watching God

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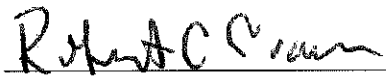
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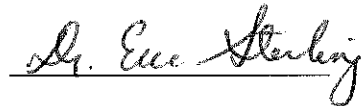
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Preface

The purpose of this thesis is to offer a detailed annotated bibliography of criticism dealing with Zora Neale Hurston's famous novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. This novel is widely considered not only Hurston's most important work but also one of the major works by an African-American writer of the twentieth century. Two previous annotated bibliographies dealing with Hurston exist. The first, by Rose P. Davis, was published in 1997; the second, by Cynthia Davis, was published in 2013. My bibliography picks up where Cynthia Davis's book leaves off, and it also tries to report information not included in either previous book. Although the bibliography by Cynthia Davis was issued in 2013, it does not include various items from 2007 to the present. My bibliography covers some of those items and will thus help to provide greater up-to-date coverage of recent scholarship on the novel.

Although Zora Neale Hurston (January 7, 1901- January 28, 1960) surfaced on the literary scene during the Harlem Renaissance, her works were underappreciated until after her death. According to M. Genevieve West, "today many scholars, critics, and black women writers see Hurston's work as a crucial link in the black female literary tradition" (1). In the course of earning several academic awards and literary accolades, Hurston wrote thirteen books, thirteen plays, thirty short stories, and twenty-one articles and essays. Her books, in order of appearance, are *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934), *Mules and Men* (1935), *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), *Tell My Horse* (1938), *Moses,*

Man of the Mountain (1939), *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942), and *Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948). After her death, many of her works were published in such collections as *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing... And then Again When I Am Looking Mean and Impressive* (1979), *Folklore, Memoirs, and Other Writings* (1995), *Novels and Stories* (1995), *Go Gator and Muddy the Water: Writings by Zora Neale Hurston from the Federal Writers' Project* (1999), *Every Tongue Got to Confess: Negro Folk-tales from the Gulf States* (2001), and *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters* (2002). Two of her best-known short stories are "Sweat" (1926) and "The Gilded-Six Bits" (1933). Hurston's writings as a whole contribute significantly to the African-American literary tradition. Most of her works focus on the voices of African-Americans and women while also dealing with such topics as gender roles and race.

Most critics would agree that *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is Hurston's most influential and well-known work. The novel was adapted to film by the American Broadcasting Company in March of 2005, and, because the famous African-American actress Halle Berry played Janie, the film gained even more publicity. But the film vastly differed from the text. Although the novel focuses on Janie's journey to be her own person with her own identity, the film's focal point is the romance between Janie and her young lover, Tea Cake. Despite the vast difference between the film and the novel, Hurston still gained some additional publicity thanks to this movie adaptation. The mere existence of the movie suggests the importance of the book. Ultimately, the text's influential impact is one reason that I have chosen *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as the focus of my thesis.

Many critical essays, articles, and book chapters have addressed Hurston's works, but the most recent criticism lacks a comprehensive bibliography dealing with this particular work. This thesis tries to rectify this lack not only by filling in some gaps left by the two annotated bibliographies that already exist but also by providing new information concerning the very latest responses to *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

In the annotated bibliographies published by both Cynthia Davis and Rose P. Davis, the annotations covering criticism on *Their Eyes Were Watching God* are not as extensive and detailed as they might have been and thus are not quite as beneficial to a scholar or reader of this particular Hurston text as would be the case if the annotations were longer and more substantial. To remedy this problem, my own annotations will follow the example of R. Neil Scott's landmark bibliography on Flannery O'Connor. While annotations in the two existing Hurston books are typically just a few sentences long, Scott's annotations of O'Connor scholarship range from a full paragraph to a page or more. My own annotations are similar in length. I hope that this thesis will assist readers and scholars focusing on *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. I also hope that it will be a stepping stone to more extensive work on Zora Neale Hurston.

Annotated Bibliography

Ashmawi, Yvonne Mesa-el. "Janie's Tea Cake: Sinner, Saint, or Merely

Mortal?." *The Explicator* 67.3 (2009): 203-206. *Literature Resource Center*. Web.

5 Apr. 2015.

Ashmawi attempts to ascertain whether Tea is either a sinner or a saint. She initially notes that most critics categorize this particular character "as either the embodiment of the perfect man, the prize worth winning at the end of a long quest, or as just another man who subjugates Janie, as an abusive and confused" figure (203).

Ashmawi implies that Tea Cake seems a saint to readers who see *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as a novel about a quest. For example, she notes that Janie marries two men who do not fulfill her or make her happy. However, Tea Cake – who comes along after both of these men – does seem to satisfy Janie. Unlike her prior husbands, Tea Cake "pays attention to the details that others have missed" (204). Rather than feeling that Janie should work (as Logan had believed) or placing her on a pedestal (as Jody had done), Tea Cake "teaches her how to play checkers, how to fish, and how to shoot," and he even goes so far as to "[brush] her hair for her" (204). Therefore, he is considered a saint by some readers because he meets standards that the previous husbands did not meet and also because he simply makes her happy.

Ashmawi also notes, however, that the alternative idea (that Tea Cake is a sinner) is based upon three facts: his "irresponsible lifestyle, his choice to live on 'the muck' . . . , and, perhaps, most important, his sometimes violent relationship with Janie" (204). Some readers consider Tea Cake irresponsible not only because he steals Janie's money but

also because he gambles. Yet another aspect of his behavior that makes some readers consider him capricious is that he parties when he wins at gambling rather than coming home to Janie. Furthermore, his choice of residence is another issue that provokes criticism from some readers because the “muck” – an area near the Everglades – consists mostly of seedy work camps that he romanticizes into a land of whimsy and opportunity. Lastly, and perhaps most significantly, Tea Cake abuses Janie. He does so because he feels insecure about Mrs. Turner’s brother being brought for a visit. Tea Cake sees this man as a potential rival. However, rather than responding to this rival by treating Janie with love, as he has done in every other instance, he instead treats her as a possession to be dominated. Therefore, some critics place him in the same category as Janie’s previous husbands. According to these critics, Tea Cake’s violence toward Janie prevents him from being the novel’s hero.

At the end of her article, Ashmawi suggests that the reader should view the text neither simply as a quest nor as a feminist work but should instead view the novel in its entirety. Doing so allows readers to assess Tea Cake’s character based upon both his positive and negative characteristics. Seen in this way, he resides “somewhere on the continuum between hero and villain, between sinner and saint” (205). Ashmawi concludes that her article neither supports nor attacks the assessments that have been made thus far about Tea Cake’s character. Instead, the article does suggest that Tea Cake should be viewed as a person who “sometimes ris[es] above society’s ills and sometimes fall[s] short of the ideals of good character” (205).

Bealer, Tracy L. “‘The Kiss of Memory’: The Problem of Love in Hurston’s ‘Their Eyes Were Watching God.’” *African American Review* 43.2/3 (2009): 311-327.

Academic Search Premier. Web. 12 Jun. 2015.

Bealer opens his article by illustrating how Hurston was politically involved in racial politics in her lifetime, and he also suggests that *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is an example of this involvement. He claims that her novel touches on the “lack of published representations of African American love” (311), especially during her era. Bealer believes that Hurston confirms (in her essay “What White Publishers Won’t Print”) her interest in both “the connection between racist assumptions about black people and fictional representations of African American love” (311). Bealer claims that his essay will explore some of the factors that caused the destruction of the relationship between Janie and Tea Cake.

Bealer states that as the heroine, Janie is a well-crafted character, but he strongly believes that the culmination of the Janie and Tea Cake relationship is the basis and focal point of Hurston’s novel. Bealer explains that some critics view the novel as a journey to Janie’s self-realization, and those critics view Tea Cake as the ideal opposition to the domination exhibited by Janie’s first two husbands and described by Nanny’s stories. However, Bealer describes how other critics seem to ignore the authenticity of the love between Janie and Tea Cake. Bealer’s response to both of those views is that both sets of critics seem to “downplay... the novel’s deliberate and profound ambivalence towards Janie’s chances, in her time and place, for finding a husband equipped to consistently encourage her self-actualization or listen to her voice” (311). Bealer suggests that Hurston seems in some ways to place Tea Cake on pedestal while also being critical of

his treatment of Janie. Because of this depiction, Bealer suggests that although Janie seems grow as a character, her marriages all seem to be eerily similar. Bealer states that “Tea Cake’s jealousy and violence is the novel’s most intense and disturbing representation of the pervasiveness of domination because he is so unlike Logan and Joe, yet sporadically performs the same dominative masculinity that they do” (312). Bealer describes Tea Cake not only as Janie’s ultimate love but also as the epitome of how African American relationships are destroyed.

Bealer mentions another critic, Kathleen Davies, who describes how Hurston portrays a similarity between herself and Janie when she describes the relationship between herself and a person identified only as “A.W.P.” in Hurston’s autobiography titled *Dust Tracks On a Road*. Davies also suggests that because of the praise that Hurston offers about A.W.P., who is portrayed as abusive in her autobiography, A.W.P. must be in a sense symbolically dead to Hurston so that he is no longer a threat to her wellbeing and to her body. Davies also suggests that this praise of A.W.P., despite his abusiveness, is similar to how Janie returns Tea Cake to the pedestal of perfection that he seemingly earned before his abusive behavior. Bealer agrees with Davies’ criticism when he says, “Tea Cake’s death enables an idealization of his character that would otherwise be impossible, but [it also] suggests that Janie’s retrospective glorification allows *Their Eyes* to contain both a celebration of the liberatory possibilities of egalitarian love, and an indictment of the way racism and sexism can distort even the most satisfying heterosexual relationships” (312).

Bealer suggests that while Janie does seem to mature into a character able to assert her own will, she still has to overcome the same challenges, especially gender

oppression, that other African Americans must overcome. Bealer then suggests that “[t]hough Janie does not criticize Tea Cake’s unwarranted mistrust,” and although she “consciously constructs a fantasy of her dead husband that excises the abuse and retains only the love,...*Their Eyes* insists upon including such flaws in Tea Cake in order to simultaneously endorse love’s liberatory power while also implying that even a ‘great and selfless love’ does not guarantee permanent liberation from social hierarchies” (312).

Bealer mentions another scholar who offers a psychoanalytic theory about why Janie’s character seems to ignore the betrayal of her implied by Tea Cake’s abusive and jealous nature. That scholar, Herbert Marcuse, theorizes that Janie’s love for Tea Cake psychologically blocks negative experiences with Tea Cake. Due to this alleged love block, she is only able to remember the positive facets of their relationship and his character. Bealer believes that this psychological theory helps to explain how Hurston’s novel portrays the love between Tea Cake and Janie while also portraying the “ways marriage and love become distorted by masculinist domination” (314).

Bealer then shifts to a discussion about the pear tree vision that Janie has early in the novel, when she is still a girl. This vision seems to reappear throughout the text. Bealer suggests that the vision leaves open an opportunity for a different kind of love than the heterosexual, singular love that Janie at first associates with the vision. Bealer believes that Janie comes to this initially limited conclusion because of her experiences with the traditional hierarchal society that surrounds her. Bealer states that Janie, in interpreting the vision, “reduces the tree to one female body, her own, thinking that ‘she had glossy leaves and bursting buds’ and immediately [bemoaning] that there were no ‘singing bees for her.’” Bealer, however, challenges this limited, limiting interpretation.

He explains that symbolically “the tree is not one woman, leaves and buds are not sexual organs, and the bees are not one man.” Instead, “the vision is persistently communal” (314). Bealer further explains that Janie is continuously disappointed by her various heterosexual marriages because she compartmentalizes herself into being open only to one kind of love. He also theorizes that she actually wants a more “egalitarian relationship” (315).

Bealer then explains the reasons why Janie’s first two marriages were destroyed and compares those marriages to the marriage with Tea Cake. Bealer describes how Logan Killicks did not fulfill Janie’s desire for the pear tree vision: he failed to cause sexual desire or provide sexual pleasure. Similarly, Bealer suggests that the pear tree vision could not be fulfilled in Janie’s second marriage because the marriage between Starks and Janie was not rooted in true love. Instead, Bealer describes how Joe Starks enforced a “class-based femininity” on Janie, whereas Tea Cake (her third and final husband) provided Janie with freedom from that stereotypical role that women were expected to play. Bealer describes Joe as simply a means for Janie to escape the dissatisfaction of the marriage with Killicks and, unfortunately, the means to another kind of gender-based oppression. Although Bealer does believe that Tea Cake has more positive attributes than Killicks and Starks, he thinks that Tea Cake is still not the ideal partner if Janie hopes to achieve the pear tree vision because Tea Cake, like her earlier husbands, “also uses violence against Janie” to deal with “his racial and class anxieties” (318).

Further into his article, Bealer notes that some scholars seem to struggle with the dichotomy of Tea Cake’s character, which seems both ideal in some ways and

problematic in others. Bealer believes that critics are not able to explain fully how Tea Cake can fulfill the pear tree vision while also reconciling that ideal with his abusive and jealous nature. While trying to deal with this apparent dichotomy, the critics, Bealer believes, blame misguided love rather than Tea Cake for the destruction of not only the pear tree vision but also the marriage with Janie. Bealer argues that “it is not love itself that is pathological in the novel, but rather the racist fictions that Tea Cake imports” into the marriage – fictions “that in turn activate a latent sexism that causes him to abuse Janie” (319).

After exploring Janie’s first two marriages, Bealer shifts to focus on Janie’s third marriage and its positive and negative effects on Janie’s pear tree vision. Bealer contends that both Janie’s and Tea Cake’s insecurities and flaws are shown in their marriage. For example, Janie’s insecurities about the age differences between herself and Tea Cake, as well as her insecurities about her physical appearance, are portrayed when Tea Cake takes her money and does not return for hours. This conduct leads to their first physical altercation. Bealer suggests that this violent argument shows Tea Cake’s insecurity about his social class. Bealer references the two other instances of aggression in their marriage to explain how “gender violence is the default masculinist response to healing a wounded subjectivity” (322). Despite commenting on these negative aspects of the relationship between Janie and Tea Cake, Bealer also explores how Tea Cake allowed Janie the freedom that Killicks and Starks did not. Bealer highlights how Janie is able to join in the conversation with the men on the porch, and how Tea Cake allows her to work right along with him.

Additionally, Bealer notes that while Janie seems to remember Tea Cake's positive attributes after he dies, her memory is not dependable. Bealer quotes the narrator from the first chapter of *Their Eyes Were Watching*, where the narrator basically states that women remember what they want to and forget the things that they do not want to remember. With this line in mind, Bealer contends that "[i]n order to honor and preserve the possibility of re-creating the pear tree, Janie will manipulate Tea Cake's complicated character to shape a story that fits the dream" (324). Bealer then suggests that Janie will completely re-write Tea Cake's character in a way that minimizes the severity of the abuse and jealousy, and how, in doing so, Janie remembers only the aspects of Tea Cake that make him the model for the pear tree vision.

In the conclusion of the article, Bealer contends that Janie must pull herself back from the relationship with Tea Cake to gain some autonomy. While Davies suggests that Hurston's novel portrays an African American woman's desire to seek freedom jointly with a man while also avoiding the abusive nature of men, Bealer suggests that Hurston's novel highlights the question of whether those two goals can occur together at all. Bealer argues that explorations of this question and of the facets of love are issues echoed by other African American female writers who were influenced by Hurston's own writing. Bealer concludes that "Hurston's identification of and serious struggle with the problem of love in a racist world" offer "novelists and scholars a new way of exploring, critiquing, and ultimately transforming racial politics in America" (325).

Beauchamp, Gorman. "Three Notes on Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*."

Texas Review 35.1/2 (2014): 73-87. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 18 Sep. 2015.

Beauchamp's article is a culmination of both his own and some of his students' observations and opinions on Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Beauchamp observes that Richard Wright's critique of Hurston's text is one of the most quoted judgments. Wright said that Hurston's text has no merit, purpose, or intelligence. Beauchamp then refutes Wright's assessment that Hurston wrote about African-American culture to reinforce the way in which African Americans were stereotypically portrayed in theatre for the entertainment of others, particularly whites. Beauchamp claims that Wright's negative judgment may misrepresent "the delight Hurston took in depicting the exuberant, unbuttoned, funky 'folk culture' of her people, the culture anatomized and celebrated in her contemporary anthropological work *Mules and Men*" (73). Another critic, Alain Locke, believed that Hurston seemed to ignore the racism that surrounded her, and Beauchamp agrees that Hurston's characters seem too joyful to be credible black people of that era. Rather, the characters "ought to be doing less laughing and more sobbing, if they are to be taken seriously" (73).

Beauchamp also describes how Hurston's characters play into the stereotype of blacks as uneducated. For example, Beauchamp describes how Sam Walton tells a story without knowing the subject about which he speaks. This lack of knowledge (Beauchamp believes) is a deliberate joke on a race that is already negatively viewed as humorously unintelligent. Beauchamp explores whether Walton is truly the "dumb" character that he is portrayed to be or if he is simply a jokester playing at being dumb (76). He concludes that it is "not really plausible" that Walton is simply playing a "buffoon" (76). Instead, he

suggests that Walton “comes across finally as an ignorant blowhard, a laughable *at* character,” and thus Beauchamp and his students ultimately concludes that Wright was correct, at least in reference to Walton’s character, in his assessment that Hurston voluntarily wrote about African Americans in a way that made them a source of comedy for others (77). However, Beauchamp thinks this assessment does not seem to be true of all of Hurston’s characters, and therefore, Beauchamp cannot fully agree with Wright’s general judgment of Hurston’s presentation of character.

In his second note, Beauchamp describes the notions he once held about the trial of Tea Cake and Janie. He claims that he once believed that Tea Cake would not return when he left Janie and took her money when they were at the Muck. Although his assumption was incorrect, Beauchamp asserts that this episode does illustrate another stereotype, which is the stereotype of the forgiving woman. Then, he explains how he anticipated that because of Jim Crow laws and racist attitudes in the South, Janie would lose her court case. Some historical events and personalities that helped explain his thinking – and that involved white racism – were “*Plessy v. Ferguson*, the Scottsboro boys, Bull Conner, Emmitt Till, [and the unfair trial in] *To Kill A Mockingbird*” (78). In contrast to his preconceived notion, however, in Hurston’s novel it is the African American characters in the trial scene who are the antagonists while the white characters are not only sympathetic toward Janie but finally find her innocent. Beauchamp admits that he did not expect Janie to be exonerated, but he does assert that the some aspects of the trial did not surprise him. For example, one person in Hurston’s text suggested that because Tea Cake was not white, the court did not care about his death because his killing meant one less African American to have to deal with. In other words, if Janie was

found innocent of murdering Tea Cake, perhaps her exoneration was partly due to white racism.

Another aspect of the novel that Beauchamp explores involves the reactions of various characters after the trial is over. He notes how the white women seem to rally around Janie while the people of her own race criticize her and her choices. Beauchamp quotes one of his students, who believed that in this case Hurston showed that gender trumped race at the end of the day. Also, Beauchamp makes a connection between Janie and Hurston in this situation. He asserts that “Janie may be viewed as an idealized projection of Hurston herself,” and “the white women who support Janie at her trial might be taken as reflections of and homage to Hurston’s real life benefactors, her protectors against a largely hostile black male establishment” (82). However, Beauchamp finally concludes that the trial is “incidental, not crucial” and involves a “surprising denial of expectations” (83). Beauchamp notes that this instance and several others in the text show an “inversion of the expected stereotype[s]” (83). Beauchamp also discusses Robert Stepto’s assertion that Janie does not gain her voice at the end of the text because her own voice is not utilized to give her testimony. He disagrees with Stepto and claims that Janie’s testimony could not be written or given in a better way than Hurston presents it in the novel as presently written.

However, in his last note on the text, Beauchamp claims that Hurston’s ultimate ending to the text is “wrong,” and thus he suggests his own alternate ending (84). He argues that the imagery of the bee and the pear blossom appears to be an emblem of the story at the beginning of Hurston’s text, but he thinks that as the story builds, this imagery seems to lose its significance. Beauchamp asserts that “[a]lthough the image of

the pear tree in bloom does not figure explicitly throughout the novel, its vivid, intense presentation early on poses it like Chekov's gun, something at some point to be 'shot'" (85). Beauchamp then suggests that because bees pollinate pear blossom trees early in the text, it seems logical that there should be fruit produced, and that fruit would be a child from Janie and Tea Cake. But a child never appears. Instead (Beauchamp observes) "Janie remains barren, never having borne the fruit promised by the blossoming tree" (87). He argues that a conclusion in which Janie bore Tea Cake's child would have been a better, more appropriate ending, but Hurston chose a darker ending. Beauchamp claims that "[f]or a book that begins with such exuberance, with the sensual evocation of awakened sexuality projected in that pear tree in bloom, to end on so elegiac a note, so barren, seems to...work against its own fructifying metaphor" (87).

Clarke, Deborah. "*The porch couldn't talk for looking': Voice and Vision*

in Their Eyes Were Watching God." *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Zora Neale Hurston New Edition*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Infobase, 2008. 197-216. Print.

Clarke suggests that while the power of voice is a typical "empowering trope" in the African American tradition, Hurston's claim that "[r]ecognizing visual difference... is crucial to understanding how identity is constructed" is a new aspect to be explored in this tradition of empowerment (197). Despite Hurston's claim that voice and vision are important, Clarke argues that Janie does not have the power of voice in the end of the text. Clarke utilizes the work of other critics, such as Robert Stepto, Michael Awkward,

Mary Helen Washington, and Carla Kaplan, to support this argument. Particularly, she notes that Stepto highlights how Janie does not truly have the power of voice because Hurston utilizes a third party to narrate the story. In other words, Stepto believes that Janie would seem a more powerful figure if the story were narrated in her own words rather than being reported in third person.

In general, Clarke believes that for Hurston, “the construction of African American identity requires a voice that can make you see, a voice that celebrates the visible presence of black bodies” (198). Thus, “the ability to use voice visually provides a literary space for African American women to relate their experiences” (198). Clark argues that in American history, African-American people have been the spectacle, the objects of other people’s sight, but that Hurston’s attempt to use not only voice but also vision in her text opens the door to other African American writers to gain power through vision rather than allowing vision to be used against the black people.

Clarke also argues that Hurston works in her novels not only to allow African Americans to have the power of vision but to prevent them from being the spectacle that they have been throughout history. However, at the beginning of *Their Eyes*, Janie is in fact mainly a spectacle: “Looking at her body, the men see her as sexed; for the women, gazing on her apparel, she is gendered” (203). Clarke implies that in both instances, Janie loses her individuality and herself as a person. Then, however, Hurston eventually turns what seems to be a negative view of Janie into a positive image through later descriptions of the ways Pheoby views Janie. According to Clarke, Hurston utilizes Pheoby’s comments to show Janie’s womanhood rather than her sexuality. Clarke states that in thus “transforming the visual into a tool of female power, Hurston reclaims the power of the

visual as a vehicle for examining African American women's experiences" (206). At the end of her article, she summarizes her points by asserting that Hurston's work is a model for how to transform black bodies from simple spectacles into "embodied voices, by recasting spectacle as visual, a move away from passive sensationalism to active participation" (212).

Dilbeck, Keiko. "Symbolic Representation of Identity in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *Explicator* 66.2 (2008): 102-104. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 12 Aug. 2015.

Dilbeck claims that symbolism is one of the techniques that Hurston utilizes in her text to provide the reader with a view into Janie's psyche. He states that though other critics have addressed symbolism in reference to Hurston's text, they have not addressed symbolism in direct relation to Janie's character, and thus the focus of his article is how "[t]hrough the use of the pear tree, mule, and hair [symbolism], Hurston shows the development of her main character's identity as a woman and an African American" (102).

Dilbeck first discusses the pear tree vision's importance in Hurston's text. Dilbeck explains how the pear tree symbolizes sexuality in some cultures, and he argues that in Hurston's text it represents Janie's desire for sexual connection and love. Dilbeck uses the pear tree vision to briefly examine Janie's three marriages. He argues that in her first two marriages, Janie is disappointed that the pear tree vision does not come to fruition. Killicks violates the vision, and Starks simply does not meet the expectations the vision

has created in Janie. On the other hand, Dilbeck suggests that Tea Cake does bring the vision to actualization because “[n]ot only does he appreciate Janie’s beauty, intelligence, and independence, but he also shows her tenderness, trust, and respect” (102). These are all characteristics, as Dilbeck suggests, that her marriages with the first two husbands lacked.

Next, Dilbeck shifts the article’s focus to the symbolism involving the mule in Hurston’s text. Dilbeck notes how Nanny makes the connection between women and mules in her attempt to explain women’s role in the world. Dilbeck suggests that this mule symbolism is most important to the marriage between Starks and Janie because it represents Janie’s gender entrapment in that particular relationship. Dilbeck notes that once Janie is no longer married to Starks, mules are not mentioned anymore in the text, and Dilbeck argues that this change represents how “Janie is [now] free of her ‘load,’ no longer required to bear the expectations of men or others” (103). Thus, Dilbeck concludes that after the end of the marriage with Starks, Janie can be an autonomous character and can escape Nanny’s prediction of her expected subordinate role in society.

Finally, Dilbeck concentrates on the significance of hair symbolism in the novel. Dilbeck argues that hair is one of the most well-known symbols in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and he suggests that it is utilized symbolically to imply how Starks seeks to control Janie in her first marriage. Dilbeck highlights how Starks makes Janie hide her hair because he is jealous of how other men admire it. Then, Dilbeck emphasizes how Tea Cake, in strong contrast to Starks, prefers her hair free. Dilbeck concludes that “Tea Cake treats Janie’s hair (womanhood) with considerate devotion, and it is under these circumstances that Janie’s identity is her own” (103).

At the end of the article, Dilbeck suggests that these symbols are important to understanding “Hurston’s development of the black female” in her writings (104). Dilbeck then contends that because African American women have been treated poorly throughout history, Nanny’s comparison of women to mules is accurate. However, Dilbeck argues that “Hurston encourages women to rise above this situation,” and he maintains that by depicting Janie as she does, Hurston shows how women can overcome oppression and attain their goals.

DuPlessis, Rachel Blau. “Power, Judgment, and Narrative in a Work of

Zora Neale Hurston: Feminist Cultural Studies.” *Critical Essays on Zora Neale*

Hurston. Ed. Gloria L. Cronin. New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1998. 79-99. Print.

DuPlessis analyzes Hurston’s book by using some of the methods of feminist cultural studies, which “attempt to isolate crucial moments when a reader understands the interplay of social contexts and narrative texts” (83). The critic begins by explaining that Janie, the text’s heroine, is deemed a sexual being by the diction utilized to describe her when she is first introduced to the reader. She then explains that the kind of criticism motivated by feminist cultural studies relies on basic assumptions. One of these is that one “must reaffirm and repractice a break with kinds of social privilege expressed in (or as) ‘literary criticism,’ especially the privilege of disinterested scrutiny of something other, in which we claim we are not implicated” (81). In other words, according to this assumption, literary criticism can never be objective or neutral; it is always implicated in culture and politics.

DuPlessis argues that *Their Eyes Were Watching God* portrays a double-sided focus on race. Particularly, DuPlessis explains how the court case that results when Janie kills Teacake humanizes our view of their marriage and their feelings for one another. Through Janie's testimony about the circumstances leading up to and including Tea Cake's actual death, Janie seems to transcend the limitations of racism. DuPlessis states that "*Their Eyes Were Watching God* is structured in such a way as to reserve judgment to or for the black community" and especially to the black person seen as the underdog (84). DuPlessis maintains that the three trials mentioned in Hurston's texts are important because of what they imply about judgment, power, and narrative in the text. DuPlessis argues that "Janie... undergoes a formal trial by the white community, a second informal trial by overhearing black men's bitter aphorisms on her case..., and a third trial by her community of origin" (87).

DuPlessis believes that Hurston wrote her text in a way that proposes a retrial because there was not and could not be any justice in the original trial for a black woman. DuPlessis also asserts that "Hurston makes the whole story a 'retrial,' with the proper jury and judge (a black woman—Pheoby), and the proper witnesses and defense lawyer (all Janie herself...)" (87). By telling her story to Pheoby, the judge in this trial, Janie (DuPlessis believes) exemplifies the power of speech as well. However, DuPlessis notes that "talk is only one part of power," and she thinks that "at novel's end, Janie criticizes those who talk without action" (88). DuPlessis thinks that Janie's perpetual silence in the text actually results from a refusal to speak, so that Janie has power in silence. Ultimately, however, by relaying her testimony to Phoeby, Janie regains her voice by

speaking about emotions and thoughts that seem to be undiscussed at the actual moment of the occurrence.

In the last section of her article, DuPlessis explores the facets of class and race in Hurston's text. She focuses on Nanny's belief that gender and class are important to one's identity. Specifically, Nanny believes that she and her daughter were sexualized and assaulted by white men not only because they are women but also because they are poor. The text's comparison of black women to mules is significant (DuPlessis believes) because it suggests how black women were not only overworked but also how they seem to be at the bottom of the totem pole in the social hierarchy.

DuPlessis also highlights the importance of class when she discusses Janie's three husbands. Her marriage to the three different men respectively determined her three different positions in the social classes of her day, and DuPlessis suggests that this is one more reason that class is an important issue in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

King, Sigrid. "Naming and Power in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *Critical Essays on Zora Neale Hurston*. Ed. Gloria L. Cronin. New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1998. 115-127. Print.

King focuses on the power of both naming and being named. She contends that "those who name also control, and those who are named are subjugated" (115). She argues that naming is considered especially important in the African-American tradition because slaves were stripped of their own names and given the names of their masters upon arrival in America. This method of control helped slave owners to create a barrier

between themselves and their slaves, whom they deemed as inhuman, by eliminating the human factor that a name provides. Thus, “the namer has power; the named is powerless” (116).

When King shifts the focus of the article to Hurston’s text, she notes that “[a]s Janie develops in the novel, she experiences the oppressive power of those who name her, the growing potential of being renamed and finally the freeing experience of being unnamed” (117). King highlights how Janie remains unnamed for the first several pages in the text, and how the people of her town are the ones who first introduce her name. However, they do so incorrectly by referring to the last name—Starks (from her second marriage)—when she should actually be addressed by Tea Cake’s last name at this point in the text. According to King, because “the townspeople have been under the ‘bossman’s’ eye all day, they now need to exercise some power in the only way they can—within their oral tradition” (117).

King implies that one of the important lessons that Janie learns about naming from Nanny, who shows her that “[n]ames are bound within the male structure, and the most a black woman can hope for is to endure within them” (118). In her first two marriages, her husbands try to use naming to control her; both Killicks and Logan call her names that place them in the positions of the master and Janie in the position of the servant. King assesses that until her relationship with Tea Cake, Janie has not been able to maintain control of herself; instead, others have named her. It is in her testimony during her court case that Janie is truly able to free herself from the control of names imposed by others. By testifying, she tells her own story so that the judge and jury understand her as an individual. King then emphasizes in the conclusion that “Janie is the

final one who names in Hurston's novel, and with her call to self, Janie becomes a model of powerful self-identification for later Afro-American women writers" (126).

Lee, Loren. "The African-American Female Body as Spectacle in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *Pursuit: The Journal of Undergraduate Research at The University of Tennessee* 6.1 (2015): 141-147. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 20 Jun. 2015.

Lee begins her article by discussing the significance of Saartjie Baartman, who was a slave woman whose body was displayed after death due to her "prominent sexual features" (141). Lee argues that Hurston avoids making Janie a spectacle in her text by not allowing her physical features or race to become the defining aspects of her character. For example, Lee contends that Hurston makes Janie a character of color without allowing her to become a victim of the kind of spectator/spectacle relationship that Baartman suffered. Lee argues that Hurston already achieves this freer, less traditional perspective in the beginning of her novel, where Janie does not realize that she is black, so that her race is not a feature of Janie's established selfhood.

Lee suggests that Janie does not have power over her body while she is initially married, first to Logan Killicks and then to Jody Starks. However, upon meeting and beginning a relationship with Tea Cake, she is able to retain agency over her body. Also, Lee argues that Tea Cake is the only man whom Janie freely chooses. Lee explains that Starks was only chosen as a result of circumstance and that Killicks was chosen for her by Nanny.

Maroto, Ines Casas. ““So This Was A Marriage!’: Intersections of Natural

Imagery and the Semiotics of Space in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.” *Journal of English Studies* 11.(2013): 69-82. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Web. 19 Jul. 2015.

In this article, Maroto focuses on the “complex interrelation between space and the models of selfhood which Janie tries out (as well as her rejection of space as a means of domination) in relation to natural imagery” (70). She asserts that the significance that natural imagery plays in this novel is proven by its significance in other African American texts. Such imagery often represents the link between human experience and nature. Maroto contends that Hurston’s use of natural imagery, especially imagery of trees and flowers, implies that Janie’s closeness to nature and her desire for sexual and romantic experience are as natural as nature itself. Also, different kinds of nature imagery correlate with her interactions with the three men with whom she has romantic relationships.

Maroto establishes that Janie has her first natural experience when she is sixteen and awakens under the pear tree. This experience implies Janie’s initial reaction to her sexual desires as she observes nature’s imagery of bees pollinating flowers. Maroto argues that this imagery is an “antithesis to her grandmother Nanny’s metaphors of the black woman as the mule of the world and the spit-cup of men,” and it is also the first of many instances in which Janie portrays her resistance to the confinement that society would otherwise place on a woman of color (72). However, upon marrying Logan Killicks, Janie not only adheres to Nanny’s view of a woman’s role, but she also allows

herself to be secluded not only from others but also from her own yearning for the fulfillment of her romantic and sexual desires.

Then, trees once again prove significant when she is sitting under one when she is first introduced to Jody Starks. Maroto quotes Matthew Wynn Sivils, who states that episodes involving trees seem to be important starting points for many of Janie's experiences in the text (75). In this case, the episode leads to another form of confinement for Janie. Starks expects Janie to work within the confines of his stereotypical view of women, and this expectation results in her being relegated to working at the store and being disconnected from nature. Maroto succinctly concludes that "[b]oth Killicks and Starks desecrate Janie's pear tree vision not only because they fail to arouse or sustain her desire, but also because they try to prevent her from expressing herself, in a novel which undoubtedly establishes a connection between sexual desire and the female voice" (76).

Maroto argues that although Janie asserts her voice during her marriage to Starks, it is during her relationship with Tea Cake that she is first allowed to have a voice and also escape confinement and thus reconnect with nature. Maroto contends that Janie's relationship with Tea Cake fulfills her "pear tree" vision, and that it also allows her to reach the space in which she is free to express herself. In this relationship, unlike the others she has had, Janie is able to interact with nature by being in the Everglades. The Everglades contrast greatly with the cramped spaces she earlier experienced, which were mainly in suburban areas. Also, Maroto suggests that Tea Cake is the symbolic "bee" to Janie's "pollen," imagery that implies the sexual desire that Janie yearns to fulfill from the beginning of the novel.

At the end of the article, Maroto concludes that Janie is finally able to be her “natural” self rather than the self imposed by others, such as Nanny, Starks, and Killicks.

Miles, Diana. “Testimony and Reproduction in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.”

Women, Violence, & Testimony in the Works of Zora Neale Hurston. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2003. 47-64. Print.

Miles examines how African American women writers seem to be in conversation when focusing on both trauma and testimony in their texts. She believes that “[b]ecause African American women writers share a unique history and position within American culture, their works should be understood primarily as testimonial in nature” (47). The purpose of this intertextual discourse is not only to purge (by revealing) the atrocity of the trauma to others but also to share that trauma with others to help prevent the same kind of atrocity from reoccurring.

Miles claims that Janie’s character and journey in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* are radical and that they would have seemed especially radical during the time period during which the text was written. Miles believes that “[n]ot only does Hurston’s heroine leave an oppressive yet secure community in search of selfhood, but she honors the ethical demand to give testimony to other women, encouraging them to first define and then satisfy their own passions” (49-50). This critic also claims that Hurston alludes to her own personal life and trauma in the ways she presents the main character, Janie. By making this character the focus of the story, Hurston tries to help stop the cycle of reoccurring traumas. Miles gives a detailed account of how Hurston’s own story is

similar to that of Janie. The similarities involve, for example, the confusion of identity, the portrayal of Nanny, and the damage done by violent relationships.

The critic asserts that Hurston, in her text, “alters the structure of folkloric cultural transmission as she had known it. She attains her goal not by eliminating the use of folklore but by granting women access to its power” (59). After making this point, Miles discusses Janie’s power of voice or lack thereof. In what Miles deems a pivotal moment, the court scene following Tea Cake’s death, Janie does not appear to have a voice because the story is told in an omniscient third person’s voice. Later in the article, Miles justifies Hurston’s choice of this narrative method by pointing out that Janie is still suffering from the trauma of having had to kill her great love, who (Janie believes) was sent to her from God himself. However, not only does Janie fail to have a voice during the trial scene, but Miles also indicates that she lacks a voice after Tea Cake beats her. In contrast, the men of the Muck are given a voice to declare their jealousy and take apparent pride in Tea Cake’s violent actions. Miles supports Hurston’s literary decision to depict events this way because she feels that “Hurston underscores the extent to which women are often violently subjugated in the name of ‘love’” (60).

Miles also suggests that Hurston makes another pivotal change in traditional approaches to writing by offering an unusual version of the heterosexual reproductive relationship, which typically produces offspring. In Hurston’s text, the violence of her heterosexual relationships results in a “split in consciousness that facilitates an alternate form of reproduction” (63). Janie’s offspring (Miles believes) is a symbolic daughter also known as her “speaking self” (63). This birth is contingent strictly upon Janie loving herself even more than she loved Tea Cake. Miles concludes that women must give

testimony if they hope to heal—and help others heal—from “the trauma of patriarchal domination” (63).

Pattison, Dale. “Sites of Resistance: The Subversive Spaces of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.” *Melus* 38.4 (2013): 9-31. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 2 Aug. 2015.

Pattison believes that comprehending the relations of space and political power in Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is imperative; however, he argues that “the concept of spatiality—a theoretical approach that helps to resolve the problem of how exactly [Janie] arrives at her complex sense of self— has been given little attention” by Hurston’s commentators (9). He suggests that other critics such as Deborah Clarke and Michael Awkward accurately depict Janie as “a figure of feminine empowerment” (9). He also suggests that Janie’s journey to self-realization is affected by the ways space and political power are connected in her life. Pattison contends that “Hurston presents three distinct [kinds of] spaces in the novel—material, psychological, and narrative—that allow Janie and the reader to challenge the dominant discourses of race and gender” (10). Pattison believes that Hurston invites her readers to participate in the allotment of “narrative space” when Janie narrates her story to Phoeby at the end of the novel on her back porch.

Pattison suggests that Péter Szabó’s discussion of Hurston is one of the best examples illustrating the application of spatial politics to the analysis of literary texts. However, Pattison argues that Szabó does not “give adequate attention to the porch as a

distinct spatial locus that initiates the transformation [in Janie] that we witness over the course of the novel, nor does he explore the larger implications of space in the production of narrative” (10). Pattison contends that storytelling itself, particularly Janie’s testimony to Phoeby, is a “spatial practice” (10). He argues that Hurston utilizes spatial dynamics as a way to cultivate change, and that she empowers Janie by showing how she liberates herself in a communal, private, space—the porch.

Pattison’s overall claims are that in “each of the spaces that Hurston addresses, the discourses of marginalization attached to African American female subjectivities provide . . . counter-sites where women may contest the dominant discourses of whiteness and patriarchy,” and that because Janie is a black woman, her “doubled double consciousness enables her to carve out spaces—interior and exterior—that situate her apart from the homogeneous presence of white male authority” (11).

The first segment of Pattison’s article focuses on the porch space and how it is important to the various groups in Hurston’s text. For example, he argues that the porch is a space of empowerment, and that it inverts the power of the white society for the African-American male characters in Eatonville. Pattison claims that the porches in Hurston’s text are where some of the most significant scenes take place, and that they function as “a space for performance, where playful language and storytelling provide relief from the imposing structure of white authority” (12).

Pattison claims that the men utilize the front porch in Hurston’s text as a place to assert the masculinity they are denied by white authority. He also suggests that the porch should be used as “productive space of exchange” between both African American men and women (14). Instead, the men’s failure to include the women is another result of the

oppressive nature of race relations because it shows how the Eatonville men “channel their frustrations by locating power in masculinity” (14). Pattison concludes that the porch both empowers the African American men of Eatonville and marginalizes the women, but he also suggests that Janie defies this power relationship when she utilizes the porch space to narrate her story to Phoeby.

Following his discussion about the porch space, Pattison further expounds upon the idea of psychological space in Hurston’s novel. He believes that as the novel progresses, Janie begins to understand the dynamics of the porch, and thanks to this understanding, she also develops psychological control of herself. Janie’s original attempt to utilize the porch space as a way to contest gender roles was unsuccessful, but Pattison claims that Janie’s belief that her authority comes from speaking on the porch is inaccurate. He also suggests that Janie and Tea Cake rework the dynamics of the porch space by making it a playing space for both men *and* women. By creating this kind of change, Janie and Tea Cake illustrate the strength of their relationship.

Furthermore, through analyzing the dynamics of space, Pattison finds that Janie begins to understand her own body after understanding the potential for change in the porch space. For instance, he suggests that Janie does not understand her own body at first because she does not recognize herself in relation to her black identity. Pattison then states, however, that “Janie begins to understand that coming to terms with race involves coming to terms with the body as an instrument for spatial practices” (17). Pattison also illustrates how Janie exemplifies W.E.B. DuBois’s theory of double consciousness – the idea that blacks always see themselves partly as whites see them – through her capability to move back and forth, psychologically, between her exteriority and her interiority.

Through her understanding, she is able to “[recognize] her racialized, sexualized skin as beautiful and empowering,” and “she [also] realizes the possibility of embodying multiple spaces simultaneously” (18).

In the last segment of his article, Pattison further illustrates the importance of narrative space in Hurston’s novel. Here, the critic suggests that Hurston purposely creates sites of resistance regarding “race, economics, and gender,” and that because she does so, “*Their Eyes Were Watching God* demonstrates the failure of binary thinking and the need to adopt fluid and dynamic approaches to political discourse” (19-20). Pattison mentions yet another critic, Barbara Johnson, who states that the narrative voice in the novel exemplifies views on race as something unstable and constantly changing. Pattison views this instability as a positive aspect of the narrative space in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* because he suggests that it shows Hurston’s desire to eliminate the power of race. This suggestion is supported (he contends) by Hurston’s sentiments in the essay “How It Feels To Be Colored Me,” where she explains that her racial identity does not define her as a person. Pattison claims that Janie’s “narration represents the culmination of her growth as a character, after she finally enters the realm of discourse through language and space” (20).

Additionally, Pattison claims that the concept of narrative space really helps to identify the difference between the front and back porch spaces. The front porch space is a public place that is typically occupied by the men of Eatonville, and they utilize it in a negative way: to uplift their egos while excluding the women in order to assert their manhood. However, the back porch is utilized by Janie and Phoeby as a private place to explore femininity through Janie’s narration. Furthermore, Pattison also states that

“[j]uxtaposed with the displays of masculinity on the front porch, the discursive activity of the back porch is rich and ultimately fruitful for our reconception of race and gender” (21). Because of Janie’s ability to create this positive space for herself and Phoeby, Pattison believes that Janie is able to freely navigate between the two spaces at the end of the story due to her freedom on the front porch at the muck and her narration on the back porch in Eatonville. Pattison disagrees, however, with Szabó’s assessment that the muck is the catalyst for Janie’s transition from public to private spaces. Pattison believes that “it is not the erasure of gender discourse on the muck that motivates Janie’s transformation but rather the more important realization that femininity is critical to her subjectivity and must therefore be cultivated in distinctly feminine, intimate spaces” (22).

Pattison begins to close his article by highlighting the lack of criticism dealing with spatial politics in Hurston’s text. Pattison believes that this lack of criticism is shocking, especially since he finds that Janie’s ability to navigate the various spaces presented in the text leads ultimately to her self-fulfillment. Pattison suggests that this idea of political space leads to conclusions vastly different from what other criticism assumes about Janie’s move toward self-fulfillment. Other critics suggest that Hurston’s main character gains self-realization simply through her narration to Phoeby. In contrast, Pattison thinks that her self-realization results in part from her relations to various kinds of spaces. Also, Pattison disagrees with critics who have argued that Hurston does not contribute to the disassembly of racial stereotypes. Instead, Pattison claims that “the porch and the subversive spaces it produces [in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*] offer unique opportunities for empowerment and redemption for African Americans and women” (26).

Peoples, Tim. "Meditation and Artistry in *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston." *Midwest Quarterly: A Journal of Contemporary Thought*, 53.2(2012): 177-192.

Peoples analyzes Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by focusing on each author's purpose in storytelling. Peoples believes that Hurston utilizes storytelling to "explore the complexity of being an African American woman within a culture that does not value blackness or femininity" (178). Also, he implies that Hurston's purpose in writing this particular work is "to meditate on the social contradictions" illustrated in the text (178).

In the first portion of the article – the portion about Hurston – Peoples highlights Hurston's lack of popularity among her colleagues and her seemingly indifferent attitude to that issue. He also notes that Hurston unapologetically proclaimed that she was not a part of the "sobbing school of Negrohood" (184). Instead, she preferred to portray the "average, struggling, non-morbid negro" in her works because this was an aspect of being African American that was not written about during her time (184).

Peoples's focus then shifts to another critic's opinion about Hurston's text. That critic, Hazel V. Carby, believes that by depicting the life of Janie, the main character of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston tries to use her fiction to recreate her childhood, which was "largely free from racism" (184). But Peoples argues that Carby does not explain the "two modes of narration in the novel," and he himself concludes that the two means of narration are meant to show that Janie is both an insider and an outsider in the

communities in which she is involved (184). Additionally, Carby asserts that the difference in narration provides the reader with details without deliberately proclaiming any obvious meaning

In the next section, Peoples compares Fannie Hurst's *Imitation of Life* and Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Because Hurston was "indebted to Hurst for early employment and networking," Peoples believes that she could not openly criticize Hurst's work as Langston Hughes was able to do in his play *Limitations of Life* (189). However, Peoples contends that Hurston does reverse the "tragic mulatta stereotype by making Janie... into a heroic, self-sustained figure," unlike "Hurst's Peola" (189). Furthermore, Peoples suggests that Hurston corrects Hurst's use of negative, stereotypical African American characters. Instead, Hurston offers "adequate and admirable representations of African American women in a literary context" (190). At the end of the article, Peoples concludes that "[m]editative art as practiced by... Hurston is constructed to unify reader and text" (191).

Roberts, Brian Russell. "Archipelagic Diaspora, Geographical Form, and Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *American Literature* 85.1 (2013): 121-149. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 5 Sep. 2015.

Roberts opens his article by discussing Hurston's travels to various islands and discussing how her experiences in these different locations affected her and her writing. *Dust Tracks On A Road*, her autobiography, details her adventures to these islands, and it also expresses how she found "a peace [she had] never known anywhere else on

earth'...immediately after completing her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in 1937" (121-122). Roberts suggests that the islands that Hurston visited throughout her life are repeatedly alluded to throughout her literary works. Roberts then claims that his "essay foregrounds the methodological and literary-critical utility of mapping the portion of Hurston's archipelago that emerges as a crucial component of what [he] think[s] of as *Their Eyes's* geosemiotic project, or its efforts at engaging the planet's material features (land- and waterscapes) as they signify in relation to the planet's cultural features (human traditions, institutions, and formations)" (122).

Roberts credits another scholar, Hazel Carby (who wrote "The Politics of Fiction, Anthropology, and the Folk") as being the first to address the issue of geography in relation to Hurston's novel. Carby suggests that Hurston's text places Southern African Americans of the U.S. in relation to the Caribbean rather than in relation to the U.S.'s northern states. Roberts explains that scholars adopting Carby's suggestions find that Hurston's views of the Caribbean play an important role both in her thinking and in her writing. However, Roberts contends that Carby's perspective does not explain how Hurston utilized the geography of other places.

Yet another critic whom Roberts mentions is Antonio Benítez-Rojo. Roberts argues that Benítez-Rojo "advances an image of the Caribbean's archipelagic logic (of discontinuous conjunction) disseminating itself globally, so that the Caribbean no longer exists merely as the subset of islands washed by the Caribbean Sea but rather as the expansive set of land- and water-spaces that chaotically repeat across the entire planet" (123). In other words, Benítez-Rojo views the Caribbean partly in symbolic terms rather than in strictly, literally geographical terms. According to Roberts, Benítez-Rojo

concludes that the Caribbean symbolically covers the planet rather than simply being the home of the various actual Caribbean islands. According to this view, the Caribbean, as a metaphor rather than simply as a specific location of the planet, covers several cultures and is relevant to the histories of various places around the world. According to Roberts, Benítez-Rojo states that in this sense the Caribbean is a place without borders or a central point, and he also believes that it is the last symbolic place of its kind.

After giving a brief overview of the history behind the topic he explores in his article, Roberts then explains that Hurston's text engages in what he calls "*archipelagic diaspora*," which "creates a sense of planetary connectivity not by identitarian heuristics or imperial superimposition but by connection, via unanticipated formal recognitions, across perceived ontological difference" (125). In other words, he believes that her most famous novel invites people from various places and traditions to think of themselves as members of a larger group rather than as mentally or emotionally confined to any particular location or distinctive way of thinking.

Roberts notes that both Hurston's autobiography and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* seem to suggest that Hurston's persona may be the narrator for both texts, but he believes that the narrations seem in fact to take place in what he terms "parallax zones," which are defined as two different locations that seem distant but that are actually related (127). However, Roberts suggests that the narrators of the two works are in fact "separated by the temporal differences between the 1930s and the 1940s, the generic differences between novel and autobiography, and the perspectival differences between first- and third-person" (126). In other words, the two works are more distinct than many readers often assume.

Roberts argues that Leigh Anne Duck, another scholar he mentions, believes that the implications of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* are not limited to the bounds of any particular time and place but that the novel is relevant far beyond any specific era and location. Roberts agrees and contends that this greater range of relevance is truly shown when, early in the novel, a bee sinks into the pear tree and Nanny catches Janie kissing Johnny Taylor. Nanny's response is to speak about a place in the ocean where African-American peoples supposedly possess power. Roberts suggests that this seemingly non-existent place seems to correlate with Haiti, an island Hurston had actually visited and a place whose culture fascinated her.

However, while Nanny does not believe in the literal existence of this island, Janie (according to Roberts) does believe in the existence of an island where not only African Americans but also women are in power. Roberts contends that this place is the so-called "Soundless Island" where Hurston claimed that she herself once found peace, and then he proceeds to explain how the island's soundlessness explains its isolation. Roberts explains that the island's lack of sound implies the absence of a tide. Roberts explains that because an island without a tide seems literally and scientifically impossible, the island is not of this planet. It is, instead, a symbolic place.

Roberts contends that when Janie is married to Starks, she finally begins to feel that she has wasted her life trying to chase the realistic dream that Nanny set before her rather than pursuing her own dream of reaching the horizon. Roberts differentiates between their dreams by describing Nanny's dream as a "land journey" and Janie's as a "sea journey" (128). Roberts argues that "*Their Eyes* transforms the horizon from a passive object into a vast and acting *thing*, or an object asserting itself in relation to

human subjects by issuing scripts that invite humans to take action, to move and travel.” Whereas “Nanny’s horizon, then, is one of objective circumscription, . . . Janie’s is a sublime thing whose geoformal unattainability . . . produces a beckoning sense of planetary infinitude” (129). In other words, Janie’s vision is one of symbolic transcendence, whereas Nanny’s dream is literally mundane.

Next, Roberts makes a correlation between Janie’s and Tea Cake’s relationship and the difference between empire and diaspora. Roberts maintains that as their “courtship develops after Jody’s death, empire wanes while diaspora waxes and converges with the form of archipelago.” Roberts explains that Tea Cake is the first suitor to approach Janie after Starks dies, but, unlike the other interested men, Tea Cake does not have any monetary assets to offer. However, when he does get money from one of his many daily “found jobs,” he inquires whether Janie wants a train or a battleship, and he informs Janie that she should say what she really wants when she responds that she wants the train. In that moment, Janie imagines Tea Cake as the fulfillment of her early vision of the pear tree pollinated by bees, and Roberts notes that Janie describes Tea Cake as smelling of spices, a detail that links him, symbolically, with her deepest desires.

Roberts then draws a connection between Tea Cake and Odysseus, the great hero from Greek mythology. Roberts explains that Tea Cake is like an inverted Odysseus. Roberts compares an episode in Homer’s *Odyssey* (in which Odysseus returns “disguised as a beggar after years traveling throughout the Greek Isles”) to the episode in Hurston’s novel when Janie initially meets Tea Cake, who does not have anything to offer her other than assistance in helping Janie spend what she already owns. In both cases, the two men

– Odysseus and Tea Cake – seem impoverished, but in both cases they are the men whom the respective heroines of the two works have long desired.

Roberts mentions that the great African-American author Richard Wright observed that spices are an integral part of colonial history in that they are one of the things Christopher Columbus was searching for in his quest for a new route to the Indies. Wright also maintained that islands have long been associated with spices. With these observations in mind, Roberts contends that “Tea Cake’s scent [of spice] gestures toward the Malay Archipelago’s Spice Islands, the insular space in the East Indies for which the Caribbean, as the West Indies, has served as far-flung analog since 1492” (130). Roberts then concludes that “Tea Cake’s promise [of providing Janie with a battleship] intimates that in him Janie has found her passport to the islands of the sea; a planetary space promising to reveal the antipodal and hypothetical island that Nanny, years ago, gestured toward and dismissed” (130). Tea Cake, in other words, symbolizes all the sensual and imaginative pleasures for which Janie has long yearned.

Despite Janie’s feeling that she does indeed want the symbolic battleship, Roberts suggests that in fact she ultimately does not want it because it is too similar to what she has been trying to escape throughout Hurston’s novel. Roberts explains that “[s]tructurally, Tea Cake’s promise to commandeer the battleship—to install himself in place of the admiral—is a promise to maintain the known form of empire while becoming empire’s new content” (131). Thus, Roberts contends that the battleship cannot be the type of ship that Janie truly desires. Instead, she symbolically seeks a relationship of real mutuality rather than another one involving male domination.

Roberts then shifts the focus of the article to explain the term “archipelagic diaspora” (133). First, Roberts explains that at one time the word “archipelago” referred to the Aegean Sea – the body of water surrounding Greece. He reports that later, however, the term “*archipelago*” ceased naming a specific sea and began structuring and describing a formal relation to material geographies that span the planet, with the originary reference to a proper name for the Aegean largely forgotten” (133). He also notes that the term “diaspora” has also been detached from its original meaning. Originally, the term referred simply to the diffusion of the Jewish people. Today, however, the word “diaspora” can refer to the diffusion of many different kinds of people, not simply Jews. All sorts of ethnic and religious groups have undergone diasporas. Putting the terms together, then, Roberts explains that “*archipelagic diaspora*” retools diaspora so as to deemphasize in-group identitarian heuristics and foreground diaspora’s recent history of evoking proliferating formal analogies among the planet’s seemingly unrelated diasporan populations.” The meanings of this kind of diaspora “are less reliant on attachments to specific cultural homelands and more indebted to perceptions of formal correspondences among humans and material topographies that exist at spatial removes from one another” (133). The term “archipelagic diaspora,” then, is thus more symbolic than literal in its meanings. It refers not to places but to relationships.

Roberts then illustrates the connection between the term “archipelagic diaspora” and the courtship between Tea Cake and Janie. Roberts contends that Janie and Tea Cake are separated by their differing social classes. He states that “Janie and Tea Cake are distant islands interlinked, and their archipelagic relationship jolts the town of

Eatonville,” but the courtship between Janie and Tea Cake “is only a preliminary moment in the novel’s theorization of archipelagic diaspora” (133).

Roberts considers Tea Cake’s arrival in the story to be the catalyst for the transition into an archipelagic diaspora. However, Roberts believes that Tea Cake also causes a race-based diaspora in the text by taking Janie to “the Muck,” a part of the Everglades where she is exposed to the different racial groups who have also come to work on the Muck. Roberts notes that “[f]raming the ‘Glades as a contact zone has been key to critical readings that attend to *Their Eyes*’s investments in race-based diasporic consciousness” (134). Roberts, however, is interested in a larger understanding of the term “diaspora,” and he argues that near the end of Hurston’s novel, Janie and Tea Cake become aware of the planet in general, and that this awareness is portrayed in the flood that follows the onslaught of the hurricane.

Roberts suggests that “the Muck” is actually Palm Beach County, Florida, and that this location is basically turned into a “seascape” during the hurricane. The flood caused by the hurricane creates many islands, and most of them are merely any location or thing elevated above sea level. Roberts concludes that “[t]he hurricane’s revisions of land- and water-space permit *Their Eyes* to supplant the continent with islands and near-islands (pen-insulas), undercutting the sense of ontological stability produced by supposedly immovable continental shorelines, and thereby offering a counterpressure to a US sovereignty equating biggest with best” (139).

Roberts concludes his article by shifting his attention to islands and their use in works of literature. He suggests that islands in literature often symbolize isolation and autonomy. He quotes Elizabeth DeLoughrey’s discussion of the similarities between an

island and a mountain. To DeLoughrey, an island is a mountain but is simply one above sea level. DeLoughrey defines a mountain as a dry island. Roberts then explains that “[w]hile heightened attention to geographical form on one hand facilitates the close reading of specific literary texts, it also calls for a concomitant mode of far reading that asks critics to look toward cultural geographies (nation-state, global South, diaspora) and recognize the formal geographies (mountain, river, archipelago) that through their planetary repetitions forge interlinkings of the planet’s disparate cultural regions and literary traditions” (144). Roberts contends that by observing literature through the eye of geography, we can perceive an island of hope, and he contends that it is usually portrayed as a raised ground that suggests the possibility of continuing to gain understanding of the planet’s vast geographies.

Stuelke, Patricia. “Finding Haiti, Finding History in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.” *Modernism/Modernity* 4 (2012): 755. *Project MUSE*. Web. 19 Jul. 2015.

Patricia Stuelke introduces her article with a reminder of the Haitian earthquake of 2010, and she quotes Pat Robertson, a televangelist, who asserted that the people of Haiti made a deal with the devil to escape their life of servitude and defeat the French. Stuelke then argues that Robertson reinforces two major “racist tropes: that of the mystical Haitian ‘other’ in league with dark supernatural forces, and the line of U.S. (neo)liberal reasoning that links the poverty of black communities to their ‘pathological’ moral failings” (756). She compares the relationship between Haiti and the U.S. to the

relationship between African Americans and the U.S. She observes that they are similar in that the U.S., a nation which (Stuelke asserts) inadvertently caused Haitian poverty through the costly price it charged for Haitian freedom and which feels that Haiti is indebted to Americans for its freedom from the French, just as African Americans are supposedly indebted to Union forces for their freedom. Therefore, freedom is viewed as something earned rather than as an ingrained right. Overall, Stuelke tries to show how Hurston's novel is essentially a story that portrays not only the Haitian narrative but also that of the U.S., so that "Haitian and U.S. histories are reconstituted in awareness of one another" (758).

According to Stuelke, the characters' experiences in the text are metaphors for some aspect of history in the U.S. or Haiti. Stuelke reiterates critic Claudine Raynaud's idea that Nanny's descent from her mental self is a possible representation of "slavery, or the rape of Nanny's daughter Leafy, but that ultimately it is the indeterminacy of the referent that matters, as it defines the experience as collective memory, shared experience" (759). She also points out that Nanny portrays the collective misery of slaves when she narrates her own life to Janie. Stuelke also concludes that Joe Starks's action of freeing the mule is a metaphor for "Lincoln's emancipation of the slaves" (764). It is what she describes as an example of the "imperial benevolence" that the United States often displays (765). These examples and several more are utilized in this article to show how Hurston uses her text as a way to portray different tropes often seen in Haitian and American history.

Stuelke concludes her article by introducing the audience to "monstropolousness," which is a word coined by Hurston herself. It combines the words "monstrous" and

“metropolis” (769). Stuelke suggests that the term refers to two ideas, “paternalism” and “exoticism,” that are implied by the metaphors previously described in the text. She points out that when Hurston utilizes the term in her novel, she refers to a “monstropolous beast” (769). Stuelke suggests that this phrase “represents the narrative force of the novel, that in turn unwraps nationalist imperialist histories and recodes them to expose not only the contiguous experience of a transatlantic racial community, but the common tropes, devices, and consequences of U.S. imperialism, at home and abroad” (769).

Wu, Hongzhi. “Mules And Women: Identify and Rebel – Janie’s Identity Quest In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.” *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 5 (2014): 1053. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 12 Aug. 2015.

The focal point of Wu’s article is the nature imagery found in Hurston’s text and how “[t]hese natural images play a very important role in the development of the plots and characters in the novel” (1053). Wu believes that in order to understand the animal imagery in the text, one must first understand the African American slave experience. Then, Wu explains how African Americans were taken from their homes and brought to the U.S., where they were treated like animals: they were refused any rights and treated like the livestock and other property owned by their various masters. Because of the work that African Americans were forced to perform, they gained an intimate understanding of nature in general and animals in particular. Wu then explains how African Americans

used “animal talk” to exorcise the disdain they felt about their treatment and toward their masters.

The mule is the first image that Wu mentions, and he claims that the mule is a fixed image for slaves because they were both considered “stupid, yet obedient” (1053). Wu contends that the mule imagery is relevant to the standard view of African American women’s role in society, which is to carry the weight of both the African American male and the master, in both “racial and sexual” ways (1053). Wu also argues that Janie represents the image of the mule most especially in her marriage to Starks. Wu explains that Janie is the mule in that relationship because she is simply an extension of Starks’s ego and a means for him to achieve his personal pleasure. Furthermore, Wu believes that African American female slaves are mostly like the mules depicted in Hurston’s text. Wu argues that “[t]hey are used and abused till they can be put to no use any more, and then they are left alone to die” (1053). Wu believes that both Nanny and Janie’s mother suffered such fates because they were both raped and then abandoned by their respective rapists.

Wu notes, however, that some of the women of Eatonville do not fit the mold of the “used and abused” mule (1053). Nevertheless, Wu argues that while the African American women of Eatonville have realized Nanny’s dream for Janie to some extent, they are still “slaves to the stereotype” of being “cows and mules, who cannot think for themselves and who need someone to think for them” (1054). However, Wu claims that “Janie is a member of [the] small group of forerunners for the liberation of the black [woman]” (1054).

Wu's attention then shifts to the steps that Janie takes, with each marriage, toward self-actualization. In her first marriage, Janie is not allowed to do any work at first, but then Killicks eventually expects her to completely take care of him. Wu discusses how Killicks views Janie in relation to the mule imagery because he expects Janie to do as he wants without any complaint or resistance. Wu notes that in her next marriage to Starks, Janie is isolated from others and expected to be quiet in public spaces. Wu suggests that in her marriage with Starks, Janie is "a mule in the shop," but he also suggests that "a mule is still a mule, no matter where she is" (1055). Furthermore, Wu mentions that Janie criticizes patriarchy when she rants about how the townspeople treat a particular mule before it is freed by Starks. However, Wu explains that even with his supposed freedom, that mule is still, basically, in the same position as when it was enslaved. Wu then explains how Janie feels a kinship with that particular mule in that she is supposedly freed from Killicks by Starks in the same way that the mule is freed from slavery by Starks. Despite this façade of freedom, Janie, like the mule, is still in the same situation as before, although now she faces simply a different type of enslavement. Wu contends that in the end, Tea Cake is the key to truly achieving Janie's pear tree vision, and that he also is the catalyst to her self-actualization. Wu states that Tea Cake "is ready to challenge all the conventional male and female concepts, and he is willing to invite Janie [to] join him as a partner in his life adventure" (1056).

In his conclusion, Wu suggests that Hurston's use of animals in her story contributes to her "vivid picture of black community" (1056). Wu states that although the African American world may not be as prosperous as the world of the whites, the connection that African Americans have with nature makes them prosperous in one

important way. Wu then concludes that like the characters who despite their otherwise oppressive situation seem to be joyous and passionate, all people should find joy in their circumstances if they can.

Conclusion

The annotations of various scholarly articles covered in this thesis are meant to help close part of the ever-widening gap that is now opening up between the present day and the two fine bibliographies completed by Rose P. Davis and by Cynthia Davis. While these authors provide annotations for criticism on Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* covering the period from 1987-2012, new scholarship is constantly appearing. Moreover, the annotations provided in the two published bibliographies are necessarily brief. Constraints of space forced both bibliographers to keep their annotations relatively short and prevented them from providing much detailed information about the criticism they discussed. Thus, one purpose of this thesis has been to provide more extensive coverage of recently published articles.

Of course, new work on Hurston's novel will continue to appear, and the need to keep current with it will remain a pressing concern. The present thesis helps fill a part of the gap, but that gap will continue to grow.

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