

Folkloric Men and Female Growth in Their Eyes Were Watching God

Author(s): SallyAnn Ferguson

Source: *Black American Literature Forum*, Vol. 21, No. 1/2 (Spring - Summer, 1987), pp. 185-197

Published by: St. Louis University

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2904428>

Accessed: 21/01/2010 23:21

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=slu>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



St. Louis University is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Black American Literature Forum*.

# Folkloric Men and Female Growth in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

---

**SallyAnn Ferguson**

A major theme in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is the blossoming of Janie Crawford's consciousness. In order to reflect fully the powerful influence of patriarchal values in this process, Hurston plots Janie's growth within the context of marriages to three different men—Logan Killicks, Joe (Jody) Starks, and Vergible (Tea Cake) Woods. More significantly, Hurston also characterizes each husband in terms of a strikingly familiar, well-documented folkloric motif. Janie's wedding at age sixteen to old Logan, for example, conforms to the "foolish marriage of old man and young girl pattern" (Thompson 39), which has roots as far back as medieval Europe. Her bigamous involvement with Jody comports well with the "Jody the Grinder" tale of black folklore, and Tea Cake Woods loves, fights, steals, and gambles much like the black folk hero Stackolee (Stagolee, Stacker Lee).

Ironically, though, Hurston consistently alters the most salient features of each folk type in order to suit her own artistic purposes in *Their Eyes*. Unlike the young wife of the traditional tale, Janie rejects her first husband not only because he is old and unattractive but mostly because he wants figuratively to make her his mule. Her fascination with Jody wanes not just because he abandons his charming ways—as the Jody does in the established tale—but mainly because his once-attractive "big voice" depends largely on shutting up hers. Although Tea Cake genuinely encourages Janie to discover and realize her inner self, he is also an unreliable and violent man whom Janie eventually must kill after he attacks her like a rabid dog. When Zora Neale Hurston organically integrates the folkloric

---

SallyAnn Ferguson is Associate Professor of English at North Carolina A & T State University. Her articles have appeared in *Minority Voices*, *Obsidian*, *South Atlantic Review*, *Southern Literary Journal*, and elsewhere.

patterns with the growth theme in *Their Eyes*, she not only exposes the character flaws that keep each man from becoming Janie's Prince Charming, but also radically defines the black woman's quest in life. The black female had better be about the task of providing for her own spiritual and physical survival because an oppressive, male-dominated world conspires to make her its beast of burden.

Early in the novel, Nanny, Janie's ex-slave grandmother, graphically describes the black woman's plight in America. She tells her teenage granddaughter: "So de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up . . . but he don't tote it. He hand it to his womenfolks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world'" (29). In other words, Nanny warns that black and white men alike devalue the black female, who must nevertheless realize her potential as a woman and a human being while avoiding victimization. Nanny also perceives the relationship between a woman's being poor and the likelihood of her receiving mulish treatment. For this reason, she finds Janie a "rich" husband—old Logan Killicks—and forces the girl to marry him. Nanny sincerely believes that he will protect the sexually and intellectually awakening teenager from a heritage of adultery and illegitimacy and from a future of economic exploitation and harsh physical abuse. With this wedding, Hurston establishes a May-December marriage that conforms to the documented motif, of which Chaucer's "The Miller's Tale" is perhaps the most memorable example. Three ideas distinguish this folkloric type: the social and economic advancement the girl expects from the union, the large difference in the ages of the husband and wife, and the eventual cuckoldry of the husband. Hurston, however, tailors these aspects of the tale to reveal Logan's inability to fulfill his wife's human desires and, more importantly, Janie's need to fend for herself.

Just as Chaucer's young wife cares little for her old carpenter husband and marries him for his money, Janie does not love old Logan and becomes his bride mainly for economic security and social status. Indeed, much is made of Killicks' sixty acres, his respectability, and the protection he can provide. But Hurston modifies this element of the pattern by making quite clear that these materialistic values belong to Nanny, not to Janie, who "'could throw ten acres of [Logan's property] over de fence every day and never look back to see where it fell'" (42). At sixteen, she desperately pines for romance and naïvely accepts Nanny's promise that the act of marriage will somehow bring it. Although she finds Killicks physically repulsive, she nonetheless expects their

union to augment a sexual and spiritual blooming already begun after she has a spontaneous climax under a pear tree. Instead, Killicks takes his young bride to "a lonesome place like a stump in the middle of the woods where nobody had ever been" (39). When he buys a second plow—thus revealing his plans to make Janie the dreaded mule Nanny warned against—, Janie runs off with another man. Her rebellious behavior signals her early determination to defend herself against assaults on her giving and loving nature. Her rebellion is analogous to that of an actual mule later in the novel—a dumb animal that stubbornly refuses until death to submit to an even dumber man. In escaping from Logan, Janie foreshadows her ability to triumph over patriarchal oppression throughout her life.

The disparity in the ages of Janie and Logan also links their marriage to the folkloric old man-young girl motif. In the Chaucer tale, age difference casts a shadow of doom over the union because it is against nature itself. According to the Miller, "Men sholde wedden after hir estaat/For youthe and Elde is often at debaat" (165). But throughout *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, age difference matters only to petty gossips. Logan and Jody, Janie's first and second husbands, are both older than Janie, and she herself is older than Tea Cake, whom she marries when Joe Starks dies. By minimizing age, Hurston signals that the problems with the Killicks' marriage stem from Janie's fear of Logan's plow—that potent symbol of slavish female labor and oppression—and his inability to alleviate her cosmic loneliness. She is taught by his staunch materialism—correctly identified by James Giles as a Puritan sense of duty related to the white world (53)—that "marriage [does] not make love" (*Their Eyes* 44). Logan's preoccupation with using his wife to increase his profits without satisfying her physical and emotional needs gives Janie the courage not to resign herself passively to the workhorse role her husband prescribes, as a more fearful woman might. In her refusal to labor without meaningful recompense, Janie indeed "became a woman" (*Their Eyes* 44).

According to the established pattern, the young wife of the old man is destined to take a younger, more virile lover because the husband is so ugly. Janie does just that when Joe (Jody) Starks shows up at her door, but not entirely for reasons of physical attractiveness. Unlike Chaucer's wench, who stays with her husband while shamelessly carrying on with her lover, Janie remains faithful to Logan until the day she leaves him. For the most part, he cuckolds himself, since he pompously suppresses a terrible ache for Janie that is aroused when she first threatens to leave him. By deciding

to “put on scorn” (51) and further denigrate her family, he misses a final chance to overcome his pride and achieve some sort of reconciliation with his wife. His subsequent cold behavior leaves Janie ripe for the legendary wife stealer of black folklore, “Jody the Grinder.”

Starks resembles the folkloric Jody in both name and character. In fact, the latter is even called “Joe the Grinder” according to some versions of the tale.<sup>1</sup> Jody Starks has about as much respect for the sanctity of marriage as the Jody discussed by Roger Abrahams in *Deep Down in the Jungle*. According to Abrahams, “Whether ‘Jody’ as a character was invented by inhabitants of the prisons or the Army, he is the man who is sleeping with your wife.”<sup>2</sup> Hurston structures the Janie-Joe relationship around the Jody legend because the folklore sounds a variation on the growth theme in the novel. Specifically, it demonstrates that a woman’s need for economic security and social recognition often conflicts with her need for spiritual development. When Janie leaves Killicks to become the wife of Starks, eventually the mayor of and richest man in an all-black town, she certainly rids herself of the menacing image of the mulish plow. At the same time, though, she stunts the development of her soul for the next twenty years.

In black folklore, “Jody” has become a metaphor for stagnant and fleeting adulterous relationships. Traditionally, he possesses the verbal dexterity and sexual prowess to seduce lonely and vulnerable wives whose husbands are either in jail or in the Army. He lacks, however, the money and much of anything else to keep women from sending him packing when their more responsible mates return. In a version of the tale that Bruce Jackson collected at the Texas Department of Correction, an unfaithful wife learns that Japan has fallen and hastily tells Jody, “. . . don’t be mad/but . . . dig you up another pad” (“What Happened” 389). Like his namesake, Jody Starks has a voice big enough to lure an already disenchanted Janie from old Logan. But instead of making promises of sexual good times, he dangles before her the far horizons and newness and change that lead to the self-discovery and spiritual growth she seeks. Furthermore, unlike the folkloric Jody, Starks does not view women as meal tickets but instead convinces Janie that he will make her his admired, envied, and respected wife. While she now understands better the role of money in people’s lives, she becomes especially vulnerable to Jody’s offer of status, perhaps because of her illegitimacy and the admonitions of her grandmother. Nanny had always insisted that Janie could never become a lady of quality until she had a husband who treated her the same way white

Washburn treated his wife. To the ex-slave grandmother, Mrs. Washburn symbolizes female success because she seems the pampered doll of a man who toils endlessly to provide her with material things. In *Ain't I a Woman*, Bell Hooks notes that black women who think this way actually uphold patriarchal values by regarding with contempt and hostility men who cannot free them from the labor force. Moreover, they equate manhood with the male's ability to be the sole provider for his family (92). Although Nanny dies before Janie meets Jody, her ideas influence her granddaughter. After Starks tells her, "You ain't got no mo' business wid uh plow than uh hog is got wid uh holiday! . . . A pretty doll-baby lak you is made to sit on de front porch and rock and fan yo'self" (49), Janie leaves an unfulfilling, mule-driving Logan to stay with an emotionally destructive Jody until he dies.

Only later does she discover what many white women already knew: that men who make women objects of their labor tend to treat them as things bought and owned, not as equal human beings. Such knowledge drove white females to begin a movement to liberate themselves from these loving brothers, fathers, and lovers who oppress. While Janie does not understand the implications of sexual politics before marrying Jody, she soon comes to understand what he means when he calls himself "'Ah God.'" After she becomes his "'pretty doll-baby,'" he immediately sets about the task of molding and shaping her into *his* woman. First, he orders her to tie up her long, flowing hair, an act symbolic of tying up her spirit. Later, when she complains about his refusal to consider her ideas, he replies that "'Somebody got to think for women and chillun and chickens and cows. I god'" (110). And when she shows her ability to think and then speak wisely, he berates her with "'You gettin' too moufy, Janie'" (117). These and numerous other incidents impress upon Janie the dear price she has paid to be the prominent but silenced and unloved Mrs. Mayor in Jody's prosperous town. In fact, when he dies, she recalls what it was like to be his wife and eloquently tells Pheoby: "'So Ah got up on de high stool lak she [Nanny] told me, but Pheoby, Ah done nearly languished tuh death up dere. Ah felt like de world wuz cryin' extry and Ah ain't read de common news yet'" (172). Feeling hopeless, she settles for the goods her soul has bought and puts her higher ambitions in cold storage. This decision requires her to suffer in silence—like her white sisters making similar choices—and to console herself with the possibility that her hard-driving husband will soon burn himself out and pass on, leaving her the fruits of his labors. Indeed, after ruling if not controlling Janie for the duration of their marriage, Jody

finally expires, willing his wife enough money for herself and the younger, more virile Tea Cake Woods.

During their marriage, however, Jody is not allowed to subjugate Janie entirely because Hurston stages another folkloric event that alters the Jody tale and provides Janie a medium for intellectual expression. Hurston equips her heroine with skill in the “dozens,” a black folk game of verbal agility in which participants attempt comically but seriously to out-insult each other.<sup>3</sup> Of extreme thematic importance to *Their Eyes*, this folkloric device permits Janie to outperform Jody at his best skill, talking. Specifically, she undercuts his link to the “Grinder” element of the folktale—which according to Bruce Jackson is a metaphor in black folk use for a type of coital movement (387). By implying that Starks, unlike the legendary black sexual charmer, cannot “grind,” Janie does not meekly allow Jody to “big voice” her but uses a “dozens” interchange to emasculate Jody before his friends, many of whom covet his beautiful wife. Instead of taking more public ridicule from Jody, who claims she is old and sexually undesirable, she shoots back: “‘Naw, Ah ain’t no young gal . . . . But Ah’m uh woman every inch of me . . . . Dat’s uh whole lot more’n you kin say. You big-bellies round here and put out a lot of brag, but ’tain’t nothin’ to it but yo’ big voice. Humph! . . . When you pull down yo’ britches, you look lak de change uh life’ ” (122-23).

When his wife declares that Starks is all talk and no sexual action, she “rob[s] him of his illusion of irresistible maleness that all men cherish” (123). Moreover, when rendered speechless, Jody resorts to physical violence and slaps Janie in a pitiful attempt to make her mind her master, since the material things for which he has labored are insufficient to earn her respect. More significantly, this response shows his recognition that, although empowered by material things to make Janie *his* woman, he nevertheless needs her feeble female consent to be viewed in society as a man.

With this stinging blow, Hurston squarely addresses the issue of female battering in the novel. Its specter had haunted Janie before. On the day she left Logan, he threatened to “‘take holt uh dat ax and come in dere and kill yuh’ ” (53), if she dared to “‘change too many words’ ” with him (53). Earlier, Jody had slapped Janie because of his dissatisfaction with her dinner. By having the violence of the Jody episode erupt from Janie’s outtalking the best cultural man of words in the novel, Hurston clearly identifies a specific source of danger to the independent black woman—her ability to compete successfully with the black male. Janie’s subsequent actions indicate that she uses this information to choose when

either to shut her mouth and the inner person it mirrors—as she eventually does with Jody—or to stand her ground—as she does later when Tea Cake turns beast. It is no coincidence that she is not the least bit squeamish about guns when Tea Cake offers to teach her to shoot and even surpasses him in skill. As early as the 1930s, therefore, Zora Neale Hurston proposes a radical solution for women who aspire to discover and then keep their voices. Through the violence of the “dozens” confrontation, Hurston foreshadows a woman’s need for preparation to meet even physical abuse in order not to be forced into the traditional female nurturing role at the expense of her own survival.<sup>4</sup>

During Jody’s death scene, which parallels their “dozens” battle, Janie gains an even stronger sense of self. Even though Jody is dying, she spews out at him the bitterness and anger that have been pent up within her for years and now hasten her husband’s demise. Indeed, she virtually talks the big-voiced Jody to death. At his deathbed, they become physical equals, and he cannot hit her when her words become too overwhelming. And if Janie is the healthier of the two, she certainly does not relinquish this one advantage in order to let Joe Starks die imagining that he was a good husband. Although Darwin Turner claims that Janie is acting mostly out of meanness and spite at this point in the novel (108), she more accurately is choosing to save herself emotionally by ritualistically reawakening her dormant soul as Jody’s expires. By exorcising those negative attitudes bred through the long, degrading years when Jody Starks alternately ignored and ridiculed her, Janie cleanses herself of any hostilities that could leave her too bitter to love again. Consequently, she can bury Joe without regret because, while he still lives, she makes her peace with him by returning the pain he had previously inflicted. Ravaged by disease, he has no recourse other than to take it with him to his grave. Thus, “she sent her face to Joe’s funeral, and herself went rollicking with the springtime across the world” (137), where she soon discovers Tea Cake Woods.

In Tea Cake, who embodies characteristics resembling those of the black folk hero Stackolee (Stagolee, Stacker Lee), Janie finds a nature compatible with her own. His prototype is the antebellum “bad nigger”—so labeled by slave masters, according to folklorist Alan Dundes, because he was unafraid of them. During slavery, he was the black with the spirit and the will to fight that heinous system (580-81). In postbellum America, he became the hero of the black community because of his strength and courage in the face of racial discrimination. Nevertheless, as William Grier and Price Cobb ex-



plain in *Black Rage*, blacks also feared him because of his uncompromising rejection of restraint and inhibition.<sup>5</sup> In addition, Grier and Cobb note that, “‘because of his experience in this country, every black man harbors a potential bad nigger inside. . . . The bad nigger is bad because he has been required to renounce his manhood to save his life’” (55). In a modern version of the tale, collected by Daryl Cumber Dance in *Shuckin’ and Jivin’*, Stag is indeed “baaaaad,” daring, and flamboyant. He “had two forty-fives and a marked deck of cards . . . a twenty-nine Ford and owed payments on that” (228). He had sex with his girlfriend “nine times before she could move a muscle” (228), and when tried for the murder of Billy Lyons (de Lions in other versions of the tale), “Stag grabbed his forty-five and shot his way to the courtroom do’,/Tipped his hat to all the ladies once mo’ . . .” (229). Throughout his relationship with Janie, Tea Cake acts like Stackolee. Shortly after they marry, for example, he steals two hundred dollars from her purse and wastes all but twelve on a night of carousing during which he gets in a fight and knocks out two of his opponent’s teeth, buys a guitar to replace the one he pawned earlier to impress Janie, and pays ugly women not to come inside a café. He excuses his behavior by claiming he needed to know how it felt to be rich. Then he brags to her that he will take the remaining twelve dollars and win back all he had spent because Janie “‘done married one uh de best gamblers God ever made’” (187). He makes good his boast, too, but not before being cut twice.<sup>6</sup>

Despite all his faults, Janie loves Tea Cake because of his attractive physical appearance—“like the love thoughts of women” (161)—and, more importantly, because of his ability to love her—“He could be a bee to a blossom” (161). Tea Cake expresses this love by glorying in Janie’s beauty and encouraging her to realize her own abilities. Instead of requiring Janie to tie up her hair as Jody had done, he runs his fingers through it, saying, “‘It feels jus’ lak underneath uh dove’s wing next to mah face’” (157). Their verbal banter is not that of the confrontational “dozens” but the soothing cooing of two people genuinely in love. They play love games together, once with his picking an imaginary guitar and “watching her out of the corner of his eye with that secret joke playing over his face” (152). Moreover, Tea Cake teaches Janie to play checkers, a game Jody claimed she was too stupid to learn, and to drive a car. With him, she feels so unconventional that she attends church when she pleases and dresses to complement, not hide, her natural beauty. Imbued with a heroic nature resistant to societal conventions, Tea Cake exhibits a freedom of spirit so assured of its own

self-worth that he consequently cannot deny a similar feeling to the woman he loves.

Yet, like Stackolee, Tea Cake has unsavory qualities, which he calls "commonness" or "mad habits" (186). Early in their marriage, he promises to keep them out of Janie's sight, but periodically they cause her great distress. At times, this hero cannot control his wife's jealousy, which is rooted in his own economic and racial insecurities. This weakness eventually creates enough doubt and distrust to bring pain and ultimately violence into their marriage. For instance, although he claims to have taken Janie's money in order to get the feel of being rich, Tea Cake also does so for reasons of machismo. While they never directly confront each other about her wealth and his poverty, Tea Cake's comments later indicate that he squanders some of Jody's money to prove that he could earn it back in his own way—knife wounds and all—and so be as much a man economically as Starks was. As he tells Janie, "'Ah no need no assistance tuh help me feed mah woman. From now on, you goin-tuh eat whutever mah money can buy yuh and wear de same'" (191). Several critics have gotten so carried away with the romanticism inherent in the Janie-Tea Cake affair that they have been unjustifiably effusive in their praise of his liberating influence on her life. They overlook the fact that Tea Cake, like Logan and Jody before him, also needs to feel superior to—not equal with—*his* woman.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, they ignore what Janie herself accepts, that she was "'start[ing] all over in Tea Cake's way'" (171), and not her own. Because she is financially secure and in love, Janie is willing to risk the emotional pain of any patriarchal baggage her man may carry in order to fulfill the need to love him and grow spiritually. As she explains to Pheoby, "'Dis ain't no business proposition [as her union with Logan had been], and no race after property and titles [as had been the case with Jody]. Dis is uh love game'" (171). In spite of his "Ah God" tendencies, therefore, Tea Cake satiates Janie's soul enough for her to drape her dreams around him.

She does so even though, before long, his problems with machismo and color consciousness cause him to become violent toward her. Signs of trouble brewing appear when Tea Cake starts to drop by their Everglades quarters in the middle of the day because he is afraid "'De boogerman liable tuh tote yuh [Janie] off whilst Ah'm gone'" (198). When he tells his wife of these fears, she willingly goes to work along side him in the fields. Some scholars still regard her decision as more indicative of the equality, rather than the distrust and insecurity, in their marriage.<sup>8</sup> But by putting Tea Cake in conflict with Mrs. Turner, a white-looking black who

represents the extremes of intraracial hatred, Hurston implies that his jealousy stems from beliefs that he is too black for Caucasian-featured Janie. Mrs. Turner detests dark-skinned blacks like Tea Cake, who overhears her tell Janie that Mrs. Turner's light-skinned brother would make her a more suitable mate than he. Instead of ignoring Mrs. Turner and basking in his wife's assurances of unqualified love, Tea Cake becomes resentful towards Janie. Indeed, he gets so enraged when she innocently introduces the brother to him that Tea Cake, like Jody, slaps her. He does so, ironically, "Not because her behavior justified his jealousy, but it [the slapping] relieved that awful fear inside him. . . . He just slapped her around a bit to show [Mrs. Turner and her brother, surrogate whites in the novel] he was boss" (218). In other words, like the husband in "Like a Winding Sheet," a short story by Ann Petry, Tea Cake strikes his wife because he cannot do the same to the racist aberrations that inject themselves into his life. Like the fall guy in a Three Stooges comedy, Janie gets hit when Tea Cake needs to reinforce his ego, even though he paradoxically professes to love her. In this behavior, he again resembles Stackolee who, when compared with the traditional epic hero, does not always act in regard for his people or his woman. His exploits are often performed to exhibit his virility (Abrahams 80-81). When Tea Cake's obsessive fears about the Turner family are exacerbated by a madness contracted from the bite of a rabid dog, he forces Janie to choose her life over his and shoot him. At this point in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston really modifies the Stackolee pattern in order to let her heroine, not the black folk hero, survive. Or as Mary Jane Lupton puts it, Hurston does not sacrifice Janie on the altar of love (49). Indeed, the author knows that, despite her victimization in America, the black woman is no sick masochist like Alice Walker's unbelievably humble Celie in *The Color Purple* who, as Trudier Harris points out, "just sat there, like a bale of cotton with a vagina, taking stuff from children even and waiting for someone to come along and rescue her" (155). Instead, Zora Neale Hurston suggests that black females should stand ready to love yet defend themselves even against their own men, who occasionally place their fragile manhood above the woman's personal safety. Thus, when Janie realizes that the Tea Cake she knew is now a raging beast bent on destroying her, she does not suffer his abuse but heroically saves herself. To cushion women against this kind of pain, Hurston claims that they must have the ability to perceive experience differently from the way of men. According to Hurston, "The dream is the truth" (9) for women. After Tea Cake's death,

Janie returns to the house she inherited from Jody, filled with tales of her numerous adventures on the muck with Tea Cake and shares these with Pheoby, deliberately minimizing the violence and pain they encountered.

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston writes about the black woman's conflict with, but need to love, the black man. This story is not peopled with the prostitutes, lesbians, superhuman matriarchs, or female masochists fantasized about in the literature of a perverse, racist culture. As Lorraine Bethel notes, Hurston refuses "to dispense with whatever was clearly Black and/or female in their sensibilities in an effort to achieve the mythical 'neutral' voice of universal art" (177), to which some writers contend these stereotypes provide entry. Hurston sets her story in a more realistic black female world, where her greatest foe is the same one faced by the white woman. Both are plagued by a sexism antagonistic to their human development. Instinctively, Janie Crawford takes on the task of surviving this enemy among the men of her folk group, who periodically advance and retard her ambitions. With Logan, for instance, she finds an old man too proud and concerned about profits to keep a young, desiring girl his wife and not just a youthful bedmate. His rejection teaches Janie what marriage is not and gives her the incentive to discover loving and sharing with a man. Like Jody the Grinder, Joe Starks has verbal dexterity and even talks himself into lots of money. He never masters the art of love talk and action, however, as his folkloric prototype does. When Janie tells him in cutting language about this weakness, his reaction leads her to prepare for the man provoked to violence. Finally, Tea Cake Woods becomes her conquering hero and gives her thrilling moments of joy and peace that unfortunately come with violent strings attached. Alone again, Janie falls back on her ability to use dreams to transcend pain, but according to Lloyd Brown, this tactic becomes a form of self-defense that "mask[s] the ultimate disillusionment of Janie's life—the discovery that there is no beeman" (45). By now, though, Janie has matured enough to know that even Prince Charming has feet of clay. But according to Hurston, with the dreams, she has found her own way to get a little love and peaceful coexistence in an imperfect, frightened, and sometimes insane patriarchal world—the crazed Tea Cake the metaphor of its extremes—not at home with its women.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>See, for example, the version collected by Daryl Dance (149-50).

<sup>2</sup>In a "Sound Off" version of the "Jody" tale collected and arranged in 1945 by Alan Lomax from black soldiers in Missouri, the leader sings: "Jody's got my gal and gone./Left me here a-singing this song" (595). Also, in a 1960s Stax recording entitled "Jody's Got Your Girl and Gone," rhythm-and-blues singer Johnny Taylor continues the Jody legend and wails, "Ain't no need in holding on/Jody's got your girl and gone."

<sup>3</sup>Alan Dundes includes several versions of the "dozens" in *Mother Wit* (277-309).

<sup>4</sup>Hurston may have been inspired to encourage her heroine in this direction by a folk tale "Why Women Always Take Advantage of Men" in her *Mules and Men* collection (33-39). In this story, God gives woman three "keys"—to the kitchen, bedroom, and cradle—to compensate for having given man superior physical strength. In *Their Eyes* none of these "keys" gives Janie any help since the men of the novel have ways of circumventing them. Jody, for example, refuses to eat her cooking for a while, and they have no children or, finally, bedroom activity. To protect Janie from men who counteract traditional female weapons, Hurston gives her the more potent firepower of the gun, which all too many black women have been forced to use against the men who project their self-hatred onto them.

<sup>5</sup>In *The Sanctified Church*, Hurston discusses and includes examples of black folklore with its God/Devil pairings. She also discusses modern black culture heroes and mentions Stacker Lee (56-58).

<sup>6</sup>In *Deep Down in the Jungle*, Abrahams collects several versions of the Stackolee toasts and gives a provocative analysis of this folk character's behavior, especially the suicidal tendencies implicit in his numerous life-threatening feats (78-86, 123-36). Bruce Jackson examines this folk type extensively in "Stagolee Stories: A Badman Goes Gentle."

<sup>7</sup>Indeed, Robert Bone sees their life together as an "unlimited partnership" (130), and Lillie Howard argues that Tea Cake accepts Janie "for herself as an equal" (105). Although Robert Hemenway concedes that Tea Cake is a sexist, he also incorrectly sees their organic relationship resting on its consent between equals (238).

<sup>8</sup>For instance, Jay Walker mistakenly claims that her going to work "grows neither out of need nor greed but simply of the desire of Janie and Tea Cake to be together, to share their experiences" (526).

## Works Cited

- Abrahams, Roger. *Deep Down in the Jungle . . . : Negro Folklore from the Streets of Philadelphia*. Hatboro, PA: Folklore Assn., 1964.
- Bethel, Lorraine. "'This Infinity of Conscious Pain': Zora Neale Hurston and the Black Female Literary Tradition." *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave*. Ed. Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith. Old Westbury: Feminist P, 1982. 176-88.
- Bone, Robert. *The Negro Novel in America*. Rev. ed. New Haven: Yale UP, 1965.
- Brown, Lloyd. "Zora Neale Hurston and the Nature of Female Perception." *Obsidian* 4 (1978): 39-45.
- Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Canterbury Tales*. Ed. Paul Ruggiers. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1979.

- Dance, Daryl Cumber. *Shuckin' and Jivin': Folklore from Contemporary Black Americans*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1978.
- Dundes, Alan. *Mother Wit from the Laughing Barrel: Readings in the Interpretation of American Folklore*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice, 1973.
- Giles, James. "The Significance of Time in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *Negro American Literature Forum* 6 (1972): 52-53, 60.
- Grier, William, and Price Cobb. *Black Rage*. New York: Basic, 1968.
- Harris, Trudier. "On *The Color Purple*, Stereotypes, and Silence." *Black American Literature Forum* 18 (1984): 155-61.
- Hemenway, Robert. *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1977.
- Hooks, Bell. *Ain't I a Woman*. Boston: South End P, 1981.
- Howard, Lillie. *Zora Neale Hurston*. Boston: Twayne, 1980.
- Hurston, Zora Neale. *Mules and Men*. 1939. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1978.
- . *The Sanctified Church*. Berkeley: Turtle Island, 1983.
- . *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. 1937. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1978.
- Jackson, Bruce. "Stagolee Stories: A Badman Goes Gentle." *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 29 (1965): 188-94.
- . "What Happened to Jody." *Journal of American Folklore* 80 (1967): 387-96.
- Lomax, Alan. *The Folk Songs of North America: In the English Language*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1960.
- Lupton, Mary Jane. "Zora Neale Hurston and the Survival of the Female." *Southern Literary Journal* 25 (1982): 45-54.
- Taylor, Johnny. *Johnny Taylor's Greatest Hits*. Stax Records, 8520.
- Thompson, Stith. *Motif of Folk Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1957.
- Turner, Darwin. *In a Minor Chord: Three Afro-American Writers and Their Search for Identity*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1971.
- Walker, Jay. "Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*: Novel of Sexism." *Modern Fiction Studies* 20 (1974-75): 519-27.