
The Importance of Janie's Tea Cake in Zora Hurston's 'Their Eyes Were Watching God'

Their Eyes Were Watching God

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the main character, Janie, undergoes multiple bad relationships. Tea Cake, her third, and presumably last husband, treats her how she wants to be treated and provides her with a relationship she values. Tea Cake releases her from the feeling of confinement that Joe Starks and Logan Killicks have left her with. He frees Janie and helps her live a life she enjoys.

Logan Killicks tried to convince Janie that she would not be of value to anyone else, and that he was the best one for her. After Joe arrived and convinced Janie otherwise, he put her in a position she didn't want to be in. He convinced her that she was above the other people in the community, while she only wanted to be seen as equal to her husband. When Joe doesn't allow her to give her speech, she realizes that he won't allow her to do many of the things that he or the other citizens of Eatonville do. He buys her nice things that she feels she doesn't need, and creates a void in their relationship by not communicating or seeming to care about what she wants.

I believe that Joe's death partially frees Janie from the life she lived. She enjoys herself, and does what she wants to, instead of what Joe wants her to do. Between the high standards and ridicule from the other citizens, and the waves of persistent men wanting to marry Janie, she still feels the influence of everyone's idea of how she should be. Phoebe often mentions to Janie how the others disagree with her behavior. Janie only becomes completely comfortable with this after she meets Tea Cake.

Tea Cake treats Janie unlike Logan or Joe did. He listens to Janie and tries to provide her with what she wants, rather than telling her how to behave. Their relationship teaches Janie that she shouldn't care what others think of her and Tea Cake. Janie and Tea Cake are more like close friends than just husband and wife. Janie gets to know Tea Cake, and Tea Cake gets to know Janie, which is something she wished she had been able to do with Joe. She feels like she has an actual relationship with her husband.

Excluding the time right before his death, Tea Cake loved Janie, and was more than willing to do the best for her. She learns to live how she wants to, to have fun, and to take her own opinions of herself over the opinions of others. In this way, Tea Cake sets Janie free.

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