

SAFARA

**REVUE INTERNATIONALE DE
LANGUES, LITTÉRATURES ET CULTURES**

N°1 Janvier 2002

**Section d'Anglais, UFR de Lettres & Sciences Humaines,
Université Gaston Berger de Saint-Louis, BP 234, Sénégal**

TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Editorial	1
Genderizing the myth of utopia in Morrison's <i>Paradise</i>.	3
Olusegun Adesina ADEKOYA	
Engendering nature in Zora Neale Hurston's <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i>.....	19
Badara SALL	
African ethos and western chaos in Toni Morrison's <i>Tar Baby</i>	33
Amara D. DIARRA	
Armah's mythopoetic vision in <i>Two Thousand Seasons</i>	45
Mustapha MUHAMMAD	
The theme of the failure of human communication in Thomas Stearns Eliot's work	59
Hilaire BOUKA	
Oscar Wilde et Samuel Beckett : deux lecteurs de la Bible	71
Yves MBAMA-NGANKOUA	
La satire de l'injustice dans <i>La Cruche cassée</i>, <i>Le Tremblement de terre au Chili</i> et <i>Michael Kohlhaas</i> de Heinrich Von Kleist	97
Magatte NDIAYE	
L'autre, l'ailleurs, l'étrange : la rhétorique de l'exclusion dans le roman historique	113
Kalidou SY	
Les constructions corrélatives dans <i>Les Tambours de la mémoire</i> de Boubacar Boris Diop	123
Modou NDIAYE	
Phonological process of vowel insertion of English loanwords into Hausa.....	143
Lawan SHUAIB	
Le shirk ou la survivance du paganisme dans les pratiques islamiques : l'exemple des Balant	149
Sékou SAGNA	
Le concept hégélien de la fin de l'art à l'épreuve de la déglobalisation esthétique	163
Makhtar GAYE	
Identités culturelles et cinéma :quelle image de l'Afrique à l'heure de la mondialisation ?	187
Saliou NDOUR	

Safara, English Department, Gaston Berger
University, Saint-Louis, Sénégal, n°1, January 2002

**ENGENDERING NATURE IN ZORA NEALE
HURSTON'S *THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD***

Badara Sall*

Résumé

Cet article montre que dans *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, le traitement réservé aux éléments végétaux et aquatiques procède d'une vieille tradition littéraire américaine qui associe la nature au devenir de l'être humain. En effet, pour Zora Neale Hurston, l'auteur du roman en question, la nature n'est plus un cadre d'action seulement. Actrice de premier plan, elle devient une militante farouche des droits de la femme noire maltraitée. Par ses fonctions reproductives et ses rôles féministes personnifiantes, Dame Nature se présente sous l'archétype de la mère qui participe activement à la reconstruction identitaire de Janie Crawford, l'héroïne principale du roman. Ainsi, à travers les contradictions d'une société portant les empreintes d'oppression, la problématique du genre est transposée dans un environnement naturel féminisé qui s'oppose triomphalement à un environnement social fortement marqué par le patriarcat.

In American literature, nature has always been mythologized for its contribution in the everlasting process of national and individual identification. Called the wilderness in the Puritan canon, nature is a place of retribution, but also a space where innocence is recovered through divine election. For early romantics like William Cullen Bryant, nature remains an inexhaustible source of moral and spiritual forces expressing man's deepest intuitions of truth. Through the adventures of Natty Bumppo, James Fenimore Cooper outlines America's first national literary hero whose main values are determined by life in the woods. In *Leaves of Grass* (1855), Walt Whitman poetizes the virgin nature to celebrate the birth of a nascent adamic self. In most slave narratives, the forest is in conspiracy with the runaway captive yearning for freedom and personhood.

* Enseignant-chercheur, Section d'Anglais, UFR de Lettres & Sciences Humaines, Université G. B. de Saint-Louis, Sénégal.

Badara SALL

Using *Their Eyes Were Watching God*¹ (1937) as a corpus, the present article has two main aims. Its general objective is to show that the fiction of black American women novelists is a continuation of the literary tradition which considers nature as an ally of those in quest of identity. But specifically, this work demonstrates that in *Their Eyes* nature is ascribed female and feminist roles through its main entities such as the pear tree and the Everglades wilderness. Thus personifying it through the engendering lenses of symbolic associations with Janie Crawford, the main character, Zora Neale Hurston allows “Dame nature”² to contribute significantly to the reconstruction of black womanhood which is the main theme of the novel.

Before proceeding further, it is worth clarifying that female roles derive from a deterministic view that establishes a biological distinction between man and woman. Ascribed to the latter according to her sex, they are essentially reproductive in the sense that they involve such phenomena as menstruation, lactation, pregnancy, giving birth to children, feeding, protecting and educating them.³

As for feminist roles, they are assumed by any individual or organization concerned with issues affecting women who suffer from various forms of subservience because of their sex. In other words, feminist roles aim at the liberation of women from all kinds of discrimination by the advancement of their interests and the satisfaction of their demands through any action, influence or attitude promoting revolutionary changes in the social, economic and political order.⁴

I – DAME NATURE IN HER FEMALE ROLES

¹ - From now on, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), New York, Harper and Row, 1990, will be referred to as *Their Eyes*, and all quotations from this edition will only be followed by the page number in parentheses.

² - Asserting the femaleness of nature, Kathleen Davis underlines the fact that Hurston refers to it as Dame Nature in “Zora Neale Hurston’s Poetics of Embalment: Articulating the Rage of Black Woman and Narrative Self-Defense”, in *African American Review* (formerly *Black American Literary Forum*), Indiana State University, Vol 26, N° 1, 1992, p. 150.

³ - For this definition see Robyn R Warhol and Diana Price Herndl, eds., *Feminism: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 1991, pp. X-XI, and also Isabelle Jacquet, *Développement au masculin/féminin: le genre, outil d’un nouveau concept*, préface de Yvonne Mignot-Lefèbvre, Paris, l’Harmattan, 1995, p. 31.

⁴ - Rosalind Delmar, “What Is Feminism?” in *What Is Feminism?*, eds., Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1986, pp. 31-32.

Engendering nature in Zora N. Hurston's *Their Eyes were Watching God*

The femaleness of nature is widely accepted in the collective consciousness of most primitive communities. In fact, many old myths of ancient societies believe that trees give birth to human beings. An old legend has it that the first man was suckled by a woman who stood waist-deep in the “cosmic tree”. It is even believed that the “tree of life” plays a prominent role in the resurrection of the dead.⁵

Being a folklorist and a disciple of Voodoo which she defines as “an old mysticism of the world in African terms, (...) a religion of creation and life (...) the worship of the sun, the water, and other natural forces”⁶, Hurston is convinced that nature remains by essence the archetypal mother of all earthly species. So, it is quite normal for her to assert, in *Their Eyes*, the female roles that nature plays to favor the reconstruction of her character’s womanhood. In this respect, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. notes the symbolic beginning of Janie’s narrative with the figure of the pear tree that appears in the novel, over a dozen times, to signify her longing for an identity with that natural element.⁷

In Gates’s view, Janie is inferentially described as a maladjusted woman who rejects her alienating community. Her attitude is all the more understandable as she does not identify with anyone in Eatonville. Neither her grandmother, who lives with her, nor the three husbands she successively married can serve as models in the forging of her selfhood. Her isolation from community being total, she therefore turns to nature in order to find the family ties she desperately needs to sustain her life. As Hurston puts it, “Janie saw her life like a great tree in leaf with things suffered, things enjoyed, things done and undone. Dawn and doom was in the branches” (p. 8).

The obsessive recurrence of the vegetable tropes used in the portraiture of Janie evidences Hurston’s intention to associate her character with nature’s archetypal motherhood. *Leafy* (my italics) is the nickname of Janie’s mother. Nanny, Janie’s grandmother, hints at her granddaughter’s identification with nature by acknowledging that “colored folks is branches without roots” (p. 15). In the same line of

⁵ - *Dictionnaire des mythologies et des religions des sociétés traditionnelles et du monde antique*, ed. Yves Bonnefoy, Paris, Flammarion, 1981, pp. 63-66

⁶ - Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse* (1938), with forward by Ismael Reed and afterward by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., New York, Harper and Row Publishers, 1993, p. 113.

⁷ - Henry Louis Gates Jr., “Their Eyes Were Watching God: Hurston and the Speakerly Text” in *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, eds., Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and K. A. Appiah, Amistad, New York, 1993, pp. 170-171.

Badara SALL

thought, talking about her character's early teenage years, Hurston writes:

Janie tipped on out the front door. Oh to be a pear tree - any tree in bloom! With kissing bees singing of the beginning of the world! She was sixteen. She had glossy leaves and bursting buds and she wanted to struggle with life but it seemed to elude her (p.11).

All these tropes borrowed from the vegetation to reveal Janie's true nature account for her tendency to spend most of the time under the pear tree, her veritable mentor. By instinct, Janie finds the maternal tenderness she cannot experience with human beings near the pear tree.

At this point, one should note that in *Dust Tracks on the Road* where Hurston describes her own childhood, she mentions a special loving tree, so friendly that she used to spend hours under her shade, talking with her about everything in the world.⁸

The biographical similarity between Hurston and Janie is obvious. Both are contemplative souls projecting themselves on nature to discover the essence of life and define their identity. Like the novelist's, the character's constant retreats under the comforting shade of the pear tree manifest her strong kinship with nature, the very substitute for her late mother. Undeniably, such a relationship finds its reassertion in Janie's romantic rejection of her grandmother's advice to marry an old man named Loggan Killicks for social security: "Ah wants things sweet wid mah marriage lak when you sit under a pear tree and think" (p. 23). To illustrate the family intimacy between Janie and the pear tree, Lillie P. Howard remarks:

*The key to the novel is Janie's idea of marriage, which is pitted against other, less romantic, ideas of marriage in the book. Janie gets her definition of marriage from nature. When she is sixteen, her sexuality awakens as she watches the mystery of a blossoming pear tree in her back yard.*⁹

Indeed, for Janie, the pear tree represents a foster mother inspiring her growth and initiating her into the secrets of life. Such a

⁸- Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, with forward by Maya Angelou and afterword by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., New York, Harper Perennial, 1991, pp. 51.

⁹- Lillie P. Howard, *Zora Neale Hurston*, Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1980, p. 9.

Engendering nature in Zora N. Hurston's *Their Eyes were Watching God*

relationship defines another female role that nature plays in *Their Eyes* to favor the main character's quest of womanhood. In this respect, recalling her own childhood, Hurston wrote that from the numerous tales she was told when she was a child, she discovered that trees, animals, and winds blowing through the leaf pines, were talking to her and telling her so many things. She even mentioned a special bird who knew her name, and who would come from afar to have a long conversation with her.¹⁰

Additionally, in *Tell My Horse*, Hurston describes Damballah, the god represented by the snake, as the highest and most powerful of all gods around whom is grouped the worship of the beauties in nature, and to whom flowers, the best perfumes, cakes, French melons, oranges, apples are offered. She also reports that the altar of Papa Legba, the spirit of the fields, the woods and the general outdoors who rules the entrance of the cemetery, is a tree with branches where offerings are made.¹¹

In sum, Hurston makes it clear that nature is a reservoir of mystery and mysticism which plays an important part in spiritual and social life. As such, nature provides learning and literary authority to all human beings able to decipher its esoteric language. Like Hurston, the novelist, Janie Crawford, the main character in *Their Eyes*, is a dedicated interlocutor of nature constantly listening to its mysterious whispers:

So Janie waited a bloom time, and a green time and an orange time. But when the pollen again gilded the sun and sifted down on the world she began to stand around the gate and expect things. What things? She didn't know exactly (...) She knew things that nobody had ever told her. For instance, the words of the trees and the wind. She often spoke to falling seeds and said, "Ah hope you fall on soft ground," because she had heard seeds saying that to each other as they passed (pp. 23-24).

Janie Crawford regularly responds to the pear tree that initiates her into love, summoning her to behold, in the form of revelation, "a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom (...) and the ecstatic shiver of the tree (...) creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight" (pp. 10-11).

¹⁰- Zora Neale Hurston, op. cit., pp. 51-52.

¹¹- Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, with forward by Ismael Reeds and afterword by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., New York, Harper and Row Publishers, 1991, pp. 120-129.

Badara SALL

Capable of understanding the language of nature, Janie becomes knowledgeable of the secret meaning of life, and thereby achieves self discovery. As it clearly appears, she goes “back and forth [to the pear tree] continuously wondering and thinking” (p. 20) for instruction and experience. Because she is initiated into sexuality by the pear tree that functions in the novel as her educator, she remains convinced that orgasm and fecundity originate in the coupling of natural elements rather than in the wedlock unions imposed upon her by the circumstances of life. For Janie the pleasure of love can only be imagined in the moments of epiphany, when seeds, pollen and bees, which inspire her growth, are in copulation.

Through the female roles the pear tree plays in *Their Eyes*, Hurston suggests that nature, treated as Janie’s archetypal mother, contributes to the rebuilding of female identity. In this constructive enterprise of womanhood, the novelist seems to exclude the people who constitute Eatonville’s black community. By giving the pear tree reproductive roles such as foster mothering Janie and providing her with liberating experience, Hurston reaffirms the femaleness of nature. Such an engendering treatment of the plant world becomes more evident through the feminist tasks that nature performs in Janie’s successful struggle for total emancipation from patriarchal subservience.

II – DAME NATURE IN HER FEMINIST ROLES

Their Eyes is about the reconstruction of black womanhood in the person of Janie Crawford whose existence is alienated by the norms of an all-black community. Unable to express herself under the tight control of a grandmother determined to marry her off for social security, she is trapped in a couple of broken marriages. Thus she goes through a series of hardships that includes her imprisonment, trial and release for involuntarily killing Tea Cake, her husband.

Janie is engaged in a route that leads her from Eatonville to the Everglades where she elopes with Tea Cake, a man younger than her; then from the Everglades back to Eatonville after the latter’s death. But Janie’s return is a surprise for her friends who are nonetheless impressed by her physical beauty and defiant attitude toward society. For further information, they send Phoby Watson to request that Janie tell them her story with Tea Cake. The subsequent narrative describes Janie’s flight from society to nature, in close conspiracy with her, in her endeavors to get rid of patriarchal subservience.

A close examination of the depersonalizing impact of social norms on Janie, who finally achieves freedom under the inspiration of the pear tree and the Everglades wilderness, will shed light on the decisive contribution of nature in her quest of womanhood.

In her narrative, Janie reveals the hostile treatment that has victimized her since her childhood. As she confides in Phoby Watson,

Engendering nature in Zora N. Hurston's *Their Eyes were Watching God*

her friend, she was constantly turned into an object of derision for living in the back-yard of the white folks, for wearing their children's old clothes, and for being fathered by a man who raped her mother (pp. 9-10). Worse, through a couple of failed marriages with black men, Janie discovers the veracity of her grandmother's conviction that "De nigger woman is de mule uh de world" (p.14).

Disappointed with her first husband, Logan Killicks, who wants to put her behind a plow and make her move manure pile (p. 30), she is compelled to elope with Joe Stark whose dream is to change her into a "pretty doll-baby (...) made to sit on the porch and rock and fan [herself] and eat p'taters" (p. 28). Unfortunately for Janie, the colored town, Eatonville, where they go afterwards, turns out to be the very place where Joe Starks could easily achieve his ambition to become "uh big voice" (p. 43). So once there, he buys many acres of land, builds a store, a post office, then erects street lamps and becomes the first Mayor.

Following these events, it is not surprising to see Joe Stark turn down the request of the town folks who unanimously want his wife, Janie, to say "uh few words uh encouragement" (p. 40) for the achievement. In fact, driven by patriarchal authority, Starks argues: "may wife don't know nothin' 'bout no speech makin'. Ah never married her for nothin' lak dat. She's uh woman and her place is in de home" (pp. 40-41). In so doing, Starks continues the subjugation that, some years earlier, drove Janie away from Logan Killicks her first husband. Like Killicks, the Mayor of Eatonville, expresses himself through the traditions that perpetuate male domination in terms of money and power. Through his absolute command over the town folks, he unconsciously reproduces the social conventions that alienate his wife Janie. As Mary K. Wainwright argues, "Janie Crawford (...) understands that being denied access to the community's gatherings on the store's porch has negative effects on the development of herself".¹²

Obviously, Janie is not interested in the status of "uh big woman" that her husband seeks to give her. Her main desire is to live as a free woman with a man who can understand her. What Joe Starks cannot realize is that his new status is not alluring to his wife despite the parties he organizes to make it more attractive in her eyes. On the contrary, Janie finds that "bein' Mrs. Mayor (...) keeps [them] in uh kinda strain (...), keeps [them] in some way [as if they] ain't natural wid one 'nother" (p. 43).

¹² - Mary K. Wainwright, "The Aesthetics of Community: The Insular Black Community As Theme and Focus in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*", in *The Harlem Renaissance: Reevaluations*, eds., Amiritjit Singh, William S. Shiver and Stanley Brodwin, New York, Garland Publishing Inc., 1989, p. 237.

Badara SALL

This conviction shows that Janie is conscious that she is trapped in the artificial conventions Joe imposes on her. Inclined to naturalness, she wants to laugh and chat with other people, which is denied to her. After seven years of marriage, the negative consequences of Joe Starks's ambitions prey on Janie, thereby worsening the misunderstanding between them. By the time "the spirit of the marriage left the bedroom and took to the living parlor" (p. 67), their contradictions were already beyond control. That is the reason why Janie's disappointment is total. She can no longer rely on Joe Starks whose slow metamorphosis prefigures death:

Janie stood where he left her for unmeasured time and thought. She stood there until something fell off the shelf inside her. Then she went inside there to see what it was. It was her image of Jody tumbled down and shattered. But looking at it she saw that it never was the flesh and blood figure of her dreams. Just something she had grabbed up to drape her dreams over. In a way she turned her back upon the image where it lay and looked further.. She had no more blossomy openings dusting pollen over her man"
(pp. 67-68).

Lillie P. Howard expresses the cause of Janie's bitter disappointment in terms of profanation. She describes Hurston's character as a blossoming pear, tree petal-open for love, but constantly desecrated before being pollinated by people whose notions of marriage differ from hers. In fact, for Howard, Janie Crawford's grandmother, and her two first husbands are the desecrators who see marriage as a materialistic security venture, thereby limiting her and spitting on her pear tree image.¹³

Originating in nature as the trope of the pear tree suggests, Janie's life is subject to seasonal changes. To some extent, this may explain the reason why her marriage failure occurs during the fall which is a period of lethargic suffering that ends with Joe Stark's death. In consequence, Janie can go "rollicking with the springtime across the world" (pp. 84-85).

One should note the fact that in *Their Eyes*, Hurston treats the springtime as the period of regeneration that comes along with the ecstatic love of pollinating flowers and the intrusion of Tea Cake into Janie's life.

All next day in the house and store she thought resisting thoughts about Tea Cake (...) He looked like the love

¹³ - Lillie P. Howard, op. cit., p. 96.

Engendering nature in Zora N. Hurston's *Their Eyes were Watching God*

thoughts of women. He could be a bee to a blossom - a pear tree blossom in the spring. He seemed to be crushing scent out of the world with his footsteps. Crushing aromatic herbs with every step he took. Spices hung about him. He was a glance from God (pp.101-102).

The time that Janie and Tea Cake spend together in the natural environment of the Everglades confirms Janie's expectations of freedom and romantic love with the young man. In fact, the aspect of the swamp where they settle is reminiscent of the edenic garden with "Big Lake Okechobee, big beans, big cane, big weeds, big everything (...) Ground so rich that everything went wild" (p. 123). In this green setting favorable to the existence she has been yearning for, Janie's life undergoes many positive changes. With the complicity of the wilderness, and the permissiveness of her new husband, she is now allowed to take driving lessons, to go hunting and fishing, picking beans and shooting game (p.105). In so doing, she fully participates in the life of the community, which was denied her because of her sex.

Now abiding by the laws of her romantic heart, Janie is able to integrate her real personality and arrive at mature self awareness while living and working with Tea Cake in "de muck". There lies the real meaning of her "journey to the horizons in search of *people*" (p. 85).

But since Janie is fleeing from people, she cannot then journey in search of those who caused her maladjustment. She finds the *people* she is looking for in the wild nature of the swamp, dancing, gambling, and rolling the dice. These happy-go-lucky black folks of Tea Cakean stock who live by their crude instincts are in total harmony with nature, the very destination of Janie. Down there in the Everglades, among them, "Janie and Tea Cake's relationship [becomes] play, pleasure, sensuality, which is (...) the essential nature of nature itself, as symbolized by the image of the pear tree that pervades the novel."¹⁴

An easy-going man, Tea Cake, incarnates the juvenile exuberance of the Harlem Renaissance. He is a marvelous guitar player reminiscent of Claude McKay's *Banjo*¹⁵ (1929) who embodies the instinctive fun that characterized the black folks in quest of their

¹⁴ Christian Barbara, "Trajectories of Self-definition: Placing Contemporary Afro-American Women's Fiction", in *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, eds., Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1991, p. 319.

¹⁵ Allusion is made to Mc Kay's novel whose title is inspired by the nickname of the main character, Adolph Agrippa, a black American gifted player of the Banjo, an African instrument.

Badara SALL

cultural identity during the 1920s. Because he personifies primitivism, Tea Cake exerts an irresistible attraction on people, who like Janie, are yearning for free communion. "Tea Cake's house was a magnet (...) The way he would sit in the doorway and play his guitar, made people stop and listen (...) He was always (...) full of fun too. He kept everybody laughing in the bean field" (p.126). To a large extent, he is the adjuvant through whom nature exerts her liberating power on Janie, Hurston's subjugated character. In this respect, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. writes :

*It is only when she eschews what her grandmother had named the "rotection" both of material possession and of rituals of entitlement (ie, bourgeois marriage) and moves to the Swamps (...) with Virgible "Tea Cake" Woods that she [Janie], at last, gains control of her understanding of herself.*¹⁶

Nature is fully incarnated by Tea Cake whose real name is Virgible Woods (my italics). Obviously, the young man's last name links him to the plant world, and thus justifies his strong commitment to Janie's cause. In fact, Hurston wants Virgible Woods, whose caring love has made possible Janie's rebirth and emancipation, to be an embodiment of the feminist ideology that nature manifests through its alliance with the female victim. As it clearly appears, without Virgible Woods's support Janie's quest of freedom would have been a failure, since the other women in her community do not share her aspirations. For this prominent role, Tea Cake can be considered as a feminist, and as nature's provisional substitute in the heroine's struggle for womanhood.

Accurately, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. points out that "Janie uses the metaphor of the tree to define her own desire but also to mark the distance of those with whom she lives from these desires."¹⁷ Though convincing, Gates's remark, which alludes to Janie's loneliness, seems to overlook the fact that the role of a distance marker which the pear tree plays finds its manly personification in Tea Cake who, somehow, perpetuates women's dependence on men. And this seems to unconsciously bother Hurston who finds it necessary to terminate Tea Cake's existence before the return of Janie to Eatonville as an emancipated woman.

A close examination shows that this device of effacing men through death and elevating female identity through regeneration

¹⁶ - Henry Louis Gates, Jr., op. cit., p. 170.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Engendering nature in Zora N. Hurston's *Their Eyes were Watching God*

allows nature to directly assume its radical feminist roles during the flood that puts the edenic life in the Everglades to a dramatic end.

In fact, “deconstruction and construction which are but two faces of Dame Nature”¹⁸ constitute the main stages of this calamity which evolves in such a way that Janie is lucky enough to climb, with Tea Cake’s help, on the back of a cow swimming near by. Surprisingly, her husband, after doing his best to rescue her, is bitten by a mad dog. At this point of their struggle for life, the course of events becomes obviously biased in the novelist’s imagination.

Called “the mother of malice”, the hurricane which causes the flood is attributed a female gender. Moreover, in the catastrophe, nature itself seems to be cautious in order to protect Janie from any harm.¹⁹ In the couple's struggle for life through the furious waters of Lake Okechobee, the roles respectively played by Tea Cake and Janie are suddenly inverted. Tea Cake, now suffering from rabies, falls under the care of Janie whom he used to protect. Surprisingly, as his sickness worsens, he indulges in domestic violence, thus obliging his beloved wife to shoot him in order to save her own life.

The re-distribution of tasks and power that determines the final destiny of the couple is not as gratuitous as it may seem. It empowers Janie to the detriment of her husband who is weakened to dependence and then to death. By this dramatic end, Hurston infers that Janie’s emancipation would never have been total if Tea Cake had not been killed. But here, one feels that neither Hurston, the novelist, nor Janie her protagonist, wants such a male feminist as Virgible Woods to be out of mind, though out of sight. The nostalgic attitude of both explains the device of reincarnation that guarantees the perpetuation of Tea Cake’s memory through the seeds he bequeaths to Janie.

She [Janie] had given away everything in their little house except a package of garden seed that Tea Cake had bought to plant. The planting never got done because he had been waiting for the right time of the moon when his sickness overtook him. The seeds reminded Janie of Tea Cake more than anything else because he was always planting things. She had noticed them on the kitchen shelf when she came from the funeral and had put them in her breast pocket. Now that she was home, she meant to plant them for remembrance (p.182).

¹⁸ Kathleen Davis, op. cit., p. 151.

¹⁹ - Ibid, p. 55.

Badara SALL

Thus, Tea Cake is saved from complete annihilation. Originating in the *Woods* (my italics) as his last name suggests, his soul returns to the woods. His reincarnation in the form of pollinating buds and blooming flowers that inspire Janie's emancipation will be the haunting spirit which turns nature's female and feminist roles into Voodoo mysticism.

CONCLUSION

Their Eyes is one of the latest manifestations of the Harlem Renaissance movement which remains the poetics of rehabilitation celebrating the birth of the New Negro from slavery, racism and patriarchy. In this respect, Hurston's novel is about conflicts and resolution, deconstruction and reconstruction. Man is harshly pitted against woman. The artificiality of communal life is sharply contrasted with the naturalness of instinctive behavior. Above all, society's role in Janie's quest of identity is markedly opposed to nature's contribution to the same undertaking. What the former deconstructs as the antagonist of Hurston's subjugated character, the latter endeavors to reconstruct as her adjuvant in the process of identification.

For her feminist and female roles Nature becomes a militant actress in the emancipation of the main heroine from patriarchal domination. In close sisterhood with "Janie Woods the woman" (p.139) who finally arrives at maturity, the pear tree, the Everglade wilderness and Lake Okechobee are instrumental in the tragic defeat of male characters like Loggan Killicks, Joe Starks and Tea Cake. In this respect, Hurston's literary treatment of Dame nature echoes the raging protests against the limitations imposed on black women by a masculine society. As such, it bears the glaring marks of gender.

WORKS CONSULTED

A - By Zora Neale Hurston

- *Mules and Men*, (1935), Bloomington, Indiana, UP., 1978.
- *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, (1937), New York, Harper and Row, 1990.
- *Tell My Horse*, (1938), with forward by Ismael Reed and afterword by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., New York, Harper and Row Publishers, 1991.

Engendering nature in Zora N. Hurston's *Their Eyes were Watching God*

B- OTHERS

Barbara, Christian, "Trajectories of Self-definition: Placing Contemporary Afro-American Women's Fiction ", in *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, eds., Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1991, pp. 316-328.

Bloom, Harold, *Zora Neale Hurston*, New York, Chelsea House, 1986.

Bonnefoy Yves, *Dictionnaire des mythologies et des religions des sociétés traditionnelles et du monde antique*, Paris, Flammarion, 1981, pp. 63-75.

Davis, Kathleen, "Zora Neale Hurston's Poetics of Embalmmment: Articulating the Rage of Black Woman and Narrative Self-Defense" in *African American Review* (formerly *Black American Literary Forum*), Indiana State University, Vol 26, N° 1, 1992, pp.147-159.

Delmar, Rosalind, "What Is Feminism?", in *What Is Feminism?*, eds., Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1986. pp. 8-33.

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr., " Their Eyes Were Watching God: Hurston and the Speakerly Text", in *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and K. A. Appiah, Amistad, New York, 1993, pp. 154-203.

Hemenway, Robert, E., *Zora Neale Hurston : A Literary Biography*, Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1977.

Howard, Lillie P., *Zora Neale Hurston*, Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1980.

Jacquet, Isabelle, *Développement au masculin/féminin: le genre, outil d'un nouveau concept*, préface d'Yvonne Mignot-Lefebvre, Paris, l'Harmattan, 1995.

Wainwright, Mary Catherine, "The Aesthetics of Community: The Insular Black Community As Theme and Focus in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*", in *The Harlem Renaissance: Reevaluations*, eds., Amiritjit Singh, William S. Shiver and Stanley Brodwin, New York, Garland Publishing Inc., 1989, pp. 233-243.

Badara SALL

Warhol, Robyn R and Herndl, Diana, Price, eds., *Feminism: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 1991.