

## A Chance at Love

By Lezley Diaz

The novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, by Zora Neale Hurston, attempts to define love in its various forms through the eyes of its leading protagonist, Janie. The story journeys through the life of a young woman as she follows the path of love where subsequently she discovers her distinct identity, outside of her role as wife. Using an analytical lens, Janie's experiences with love bring into perspective a much bigger concept about the interpretation of love and how that interpretation molds her and the society in which she resides. This bigger concept of love is best explained by Stephanie Coontz in her book, *Marriage, A History from Obedience to Intimacy or How Love Conquered Marriage* and further elaborated by Martin Luther King Jr., who classifies love into three different categories: *agape* (love for neighbor), *philia* (requited love), and *eros* (romantic love) (King 95). These loves contribute to Janie's character and her capacity to appreciate herself as she becomes the love she wishes to see in the world.

Janie's first marriage with Logan Killicks is a prime example of arranged marriages that occur in many different cultures. Stephanie Coontz discusses the motive and underlying purpose of arranged marriages in both the past and present in such situations. Janie is initially approached with the idea of marriage by Nanny. Nanny feels that Janie is ready for marriage after kissing Johnny Taylor. She says, "you don't want to marry off decent like, do yuh? You just wants to hug and kiss and feel around with first one man and then another, huh?" (Hurston 13). This is important as it emphasizes some of the cultural beliefs and perspectives about marriage that existed in the 1930's. In this case, a kiss was sufficient enough for Nanny to begin making

marriage plans. It is apparent that Nanny has another reason for wanting Janie to marry: “Tain’t Logan Killicks Ah wants you to have, baby, it’s protection. Ah ain’t gittin’ old, honey. Ah’m done ole. . . . Mah daily prayer is tuh see you safe in life” (15). In the middle ages, the dowry a wife brought with her at marriage was most likely the greatest amount of goods a man would ever accumulate while finding a husband was the most significant economic investment that a woman could make in her life. This idea of marrying for economic and political stability is a recurring theme in Coontz’s book where she outlines that “marriage was the most important marker of adulthood and respectability as well as the main source of social security, medical care, and unemployment insurance” (110). Because of this, Janie’s marriage with Logan is not an act of love but merely an act of survival, as Janie is unable to care for herself.

As Janie progressed into her marriage, it was clear that she expected some type of love to develop. Many cultural groups believe that love should not exist before marriage. If one was lucky, one could grow to love their spouse in many years of marriage. In ancient India, falling in love before marriage was seen as disturbing while in Zambia, many married Bemba husbands and wives don’t even share a meal together (Coontz 120). In this aspect, romantic love or *philia* may never fully flourish. It is possible for *agape* to exist within arranged marriages yet one must possess complete selflessness. In this case, *agape* means “loving others for their own sakes. It is a neighbor regarding concern for others” (King 95). Oftentimes, the wife and husband may come to appreciate and care for one another simply because they have shared their lives together. There was potential for *agape* between Janie and Logan, but many times Janie refused to appreciate Logan for his hard work as she was more concerned about Logan’s age and physical attributes. Logan also had no real love for Janie either as he mainly used her for labor. Janie did not love Logan as a husband, friend or person. At this point, Janie was too immature to have a

love that was *agape* or any other type of love therefore love did not exist between her and Logan. As Janie realized the faults in her first marriage, she yearned for a luxurious and independent life. It was not until the end of her second marriage that Janie would learn the importance of being a free, independent woman.

Jody and Janie have a marriage based upon appearances. Mostly, Jody's concept of an ideal wife was one of beauty, class and good posture. This type of marriage was common in the early eighteenth century. Coontz reports that "American lovers often said they looked for candor in each other . . . candor meant fairness, kindness, and good temper. People wanted a spouse who did not pry too deeply" (Coontz 117). Jody expects Janie to retain this type of candor. For example, Jody prohibits Janie from making a speech as he said "mah wife don't know nothing' bout no speech makin.' Ah never married her for nothin' lak dat. She's uh woman and her place is in de home" (Hurston 43). In another instance, Jody refuses to allow Janie to attend the mule's funeral simply because he believes that she has too much class to participate in such an event as he says to Janie, "You wouldn't be seen at uh draggin'-out, wouldja? Wid any and everybody in uh passle pushin' and shovin' wid they no -manners selves" (60). Marriage, in this sense, is the union between a domineering man and his woman. Janie is the "trophy wife" and Jody is the educated powerful mayor. This shows how Jody looked at Janie more as an object and less as a loving wife.

In the perspective of the three different loves, Janie and Jody's marriage was a mixture of both *philia* (requited love) and *agape* (love for neighbor). At first, Janie had acquired a type of *philia* or reciprocal love for Jody as she viewed him as her "Prince Charming" since he is the man that rescued her from Logan. Perhaps, she wanted to love Jody in a romantic way, but it seems that she loved Jody because she thought *he* loved *her*. In the beginning of the marriage,

Janie did not have to work and Jody bought her anything she desired. On some occasions, he treated her in a loving and patient way. In this sense, it was not as if Janie strictly equated the material objects and leisurely life that Jody gives her as love. Yet, it is seemingly apparent that Janie sees these objects as acts of affection. It was more the thought and manner that is underneath Logan's romanticism. Perhaps, Janie thinks Jody buys her clothes because he wants to do something kind for her or he does not want her to work because he wants her to not be stressed because he deeply values her as a person. As a man, he believes that work is his role. He was the man that promised her a life of security and love. In a way, Janie created these illusions of Jody only to feel as if she was loved for the right reasons. Janie loves Jody as her knight in shining armor yet she refuses to see the man he really is after the suit comes off.

After several years of marriage, Janie realizes how selfish Jody was as he nearly took all of her independence and liberty away as he made her hide her hair and work in the store everyday. The *philia* that Janie has for Jody fades as Jody's respect and love for Janie diminishes. As Jody is facing death, Janie then establishes an *agape* love for Jody. Standing next to Jody's deathbed, Janie tells Jody all of the things she thought were wrong, not only about their marriage but also about the manner in which he treated her. Her honesty with Jody is a representation of *agape* because she acquired a "love in which the individual seeks not his own good, but the good of his neighbor... it is redeeming good will for all men" (King 95). The truth hurt but it also strengthened Jody and his spirit only if it was for those few seconds before his death. Honesty is love. Janie depicts this as she tells Jody, "You got tuh die tuh find out dat you got tuh pacify somebody besides yo'self if you wants any love and sympathy in dis world. You ain't tried to pacify nobody but yo'self" (Hurston 87). After Jody's death, Janie reflects upon Jody's life and death. The author sketches Janie's sense of compassion as she notes: "She was

full of pity for the first time in years. Jody had been hard on her and others, but life had mishandled him too. Maybe if she had known some other way to try, she might have made his face different” (87). Janie’s ability to create this type of selfless love is a sign of growing maturity. She shows that she can stand alone and most importantly, stand up for herself. It is through this marriage that she comes to find her voice, a little sore but stronger than ever.

Janie’s marriage with Teacake is the first loving marriage that Janie has been in at this point. Unlike her marriage with Logan and Jody, her marriage with Teacake is supported by love. At this time, Janie is a widower and financially stable as she collected money from Jody’s inheritance. Janie and Teacake’s relationship is unique as Janie is much older than Teacake. In addition, Teacake rarely had money, leaving Janie with much of the financial responsibility. This type of relationship is growing in the modern United States. Coontz writes, “In societies where women were approaching equality with men in economic and political affairs, females were much less likely to seek older, high-earning men as husbands” (Coontz 127). Teacake gives Janie the feeling of equality in their relationship as he allows her to work beside him. This relationship, though, is based upon much more than who controls whose money. They have passion and a sexual attraction which is also an important part of marriage. Even more, an intimacy exists between Janie and Teacake as they are able to talk and compromise together as a couple. Coontz reports that “ In the U.S., 80 percent of women in their twenties believed that having a husband who can talk about his feelings is more important than having one who makes a good living” (127). Although Teacake appears to be somewhat domineering and possessive at times, he is the only man that truly loves Janie for Janie and consequently helped Janie come to love herself.

*Eros, philia* and *agape* are all present in Janie and Teacake’s relationship. *Philia* originally appears when Janie and Teacake first meet. Janie is excited when Teacake first comes

into the stores as he flirts with her and even invites her to play checkers with him. Hurston describes Janie's exuberance saying, "She found herself glowing inside. Somebody wanted her to play. Somebody thought it natural for her to play. That was even nice" (Hurston 96). She shares a reciprocal love towards Teacake as he makes her feel like an equal and moreover a person worthy of his time. *Eros* love or romantic love is demonstrated when Teacake asks Janie to go to a picnic with him where the whole town will see them. Janie thinks of Teacake's suggestion as a sweet gesture yet fears that Teacake may have bad intentions. To convince her of his honesty, Teacake says, "Nobody else on earth kin hold a candle tuh you baby. You got de keys to de kingdom" (109). Many romantic moments such as these occur throughout their relationship. One can see that there is not only lust but a genuine attraction. At last, *agape* flowers as Teacake sacrifices his own life to save Janie's life. Teacake had an overflowing love that was "purely spontaneous, unmotivated, groundless and creative" (King 95). Janie acknowledges this love as she says, "Ah jus' know dat God snatched me out de fire through you. And Ah loves yuh and feel glad" (Hurston 180). Teacake's death and love brings Janie the hope, strength and courage to begin a new life and a new her. Janie is completely changed and forever impacted by Teacake and it was this love that leads to her rebirth as an emancipated woman.

Above all, Janie acquires an immense appreciation for love in and of itself as she uncovers the love that lives within her. It is not merely *agape* or *philia* or even *eros* that helps build the wonderful woman Janie was, it was all three. The love that Janie experienced through Jody, Logan and Teacake may seem eternally forgotten and dead yet they remain deeply invested in Janie's interior soul. Within this love, Janie carries the power to create change and a sense of dignity that will continue to grow as her life's adventure continues. In this way, she will carry their love forever. As Janie says, "Love is lak de sea. It's uh movin' thing, but still and all, it

takes shape from the shore it meets, and it's different with every shore" (191). As Janie discovers this abyss of internal love, she finds a new human being, one who is altered yet truly and uniquely a person abundantly filled with spiritual enlightenment.

#### Works Cited

- Coontz, Stephanie. *Marriage, A History: From Obedience to Intimacy Or, How Love Conquered Marriage* (selections). *The Human Experience: Core 110/115 Coursepack*. Valparaiso University. Southlake, TX: Fountainhead Press, 2007. 107-141.
- Hurston, Neale Zora. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006 (Harper Perennial Modern Classics edition).
- King, Luther Martin. "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence." *The Human Experience: Core 110/115 Coursepack*. Valparaiso University. Southlake, TX: Fountainhead Press, 2007. 89-96.