

CAUGHT IN THE COTTON:

THE INTERCHANGEABILITY OF COLOR IN HURSTON AND MITCHELL

By Kimberly Coleman

There are many similarities between Katie Scarlett O'Hara of Margaret Mitchell's infamous novel about the Civil War and Reconstruction in the American South, *Gone With the Wind*, and Janie May Crawford of Zora Neale Hurston's tale of identity and love, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Because there has never been anything written on this topic, one can assume that almost all critics claim that there are no possible similarities between *Gone with the Wind* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, even being emphatic enough to proclaim that such comparisons are insensitive and inherently racist. According to Grace Elizabeth Hale, "[t]o be American is to be both black and white" (qtd. in Railton 2). Since Hurston and Mitchell are of different ethnicities, critics ignore most similarities between their characters. The surface issues of race and gender take precedence in any conversation concerning *Gone with the Wind* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. While there are marked differences between the two female protagonists, there are also elements that join them across racial and sexual lines, creating bridges that often go unnoticed. The similarities between Scarlett and Janie in these novels—though they were written without knowledge of one another—are the authors' attempts to

harness the female energy in a historical moment between the suffrage movement and the later twentieth-century feminist movement. Through these characters, both authors advocate to southern women the need to embrace their own individuality and take control of their own lives outside of the bonds of male society *and* racial lines.

Margaret Mitchell discusses a controversial period in United States history where there was much racial and gender turmoil, and much of her novel is rightfully criticized for its overly racist and sexist language. It is interesting to note that “Margaret Mitchell wrote a strikingly white novel, so white in fact that some of the white characters seem black” (Williamson 97). The story is even more racist than it would otherwise have been because Mitchell grew up in a sheltered life and had little exposure to the real world beyond Atlanta. Critics often cite the portrayal of the relationship of rich, white, slave owners and their ‘happy’ slaves. The story of *Gone with the Wind* is that of the struggle of a young woman trying to keep her head above water and keep her quickly declining family out of the worst situations after the deaths of their lovingly controlling matriarch and patriarch. However, the story that readers overlook is Scarlett’s coming into her self, the female awakening of Scarlett among the mass of death and destruction around her. Scarlett, like most aging heroines, struggles to find an identity that pleases her in a world that she fits into the physical standards of beauty, but is mentally ahead of her time.

In seeming contrast to this epic novel is the story of a young, black woman learning to become herself through the adversity presented by her elders and men in her community. As Carol Batker says in her article “*Love Me Like I Like to Be*”: *The Sexual Politics of Hurston’s Their Eyes Were Watching God, the Classic Blues, and the Black Woman’s Club Movement*, “*Their Eyes* concerns itself with the question of African American women’s sexual identity” (205). Janie is a gentle woman who longs for the passion, excitement, and freedom of a real romance, but she faces many obstacles in her path to true love and self-enlightenment. She struggles from a childhood made

difficult by the neuroses born of the violent experiences of both her mother, who abandons her, and her grandmother, who has been beaten down by a harsh reality. Janie did not grow up with a real sense of her physical and spiritual identity, and she must work through a couple of marriages to finally find that innate passion of not only a woman of the American South, but of a black woman and her own identity.

When comparing the novels, more often than not, the reader overlooks the plethora of similarities between Scarlett and Janie.¹ It is interesting to note that both of these landmark novels of southern literature appeared a year apart from one another in the 1930s and concern passionate women, and above all, love. During their novels, both women metaphorically ‘try on’ several different male personalities before finding the one that fits each best in partnership and marriage. These two women’s names create an identity for them by their very sounds: Katie Scarlett O’Hara sounds decidedly like the daughter of a feisty, Irish immigrant and Janie Mae Crawford sounds like a girl from the country. Neither woman can initially claim her identity because she is so wrapped up in the expected standards and opinions of those people around her.

Critics focus on the whiteness of Scarlett and the blackness of Janie, the racism of *Gone with the Wind*, and the liberating nature of *Their Eyes are Watching God*. What is overlooked in the conversation is the whiteness of Janie and the blackness of Scarlett. Even their appearances are the opposite of what is expected. Because Scarlett is a tomboy and spends an immense amount of time playing with the boys and riding horses with her father growing up, she is described as tan or dark. Janie, however, is almost given an alter ego by her light skin because her father was a white,

¹ Margaret Mitchell published her novel in May of 1936, and from a letter written by Hurston to Mr. William Stanley Hoole, written during her time in Haiti, in which she says, “My next book is to be a novel about a woman who was from childhood hungry for life and the earth” (Letters 366). From this we know that she had the idea for the story of Janie in January of the same year, publishing it in 1937. The novels first appear to be playing off of one another, but the only commiserating factor is that they were both women writers experiencing the Great Depression and its social changes.

slave-owning rapist. Even in her relationship with Tea Cake, her skin sets her apart from the community in the eyes of her neighbors, and he beats her to show the community that she is not better than her lover. Additionally, neither woman ever truly escapes her plantation/manor house roots, but by the end of the two respective novels, each woman does manage to confuse the racial and sexual boundaries within her novel/genre.

The first and most obvious comparison between these two vivacious women is that they both have multiple marriages within the course of the novels and both culminate in finding and losing the love of her life. Rhett grabs Scarlett's attention from the first scene at the Wilkes' barbeque to the very last page. However, she does not admit her interest in him even to herself until nearly the moment when Rhett gets fed up with her childish, spoiled attitude and her obsession with Ashley Wilkes and leaves her. Scarlett goes through two husbands by the time she marries Rhett. Her first husband is Charles Hamilton, a young man around her own age who happens to be the brother of Melanie Hamilton, the woman Scarlett sees as her arch-enemy and competitor for the affection of the man she views as her one true love, Ashley. She marries Charles not because she has any real love for him. In fact, she almost resents him for his gentle spirit and shy gullibility, but she can use him to hurt both Ashley for not agreeing to love and to marry her and Melanie for taking Ashley away from her. Conveniently, Charles dies of disease before the war really has a chance to begin

Her second husband, through a marriage of convenience, is a man named Frank Kennedy, whom Scarlett manipulates away from her sister Suellen. She marries Frank Kennedy because she needs something only a wealthy, new business can give her--enough money to pay the raised taxes on her family home Tara after the end of the war so the family can continue to live in it comfortably as in pre-war years and not as poor, white trash. To Scarlett, and all the O'Hara clan, including the house slaves, death is better than allowing poor, white trash to take over Tara. In

her first two marriages, she shows no concern for the emotions of the people around her, including alienating Suellen, only using the marriages as a catalyst to get what she wants or needs, usually to keep her and the people who reside on the plantation alive and fed. In this way, Scarlett is the perfect, strong woman, but she works in the dirt, in the fields, and with animals, which are all occupations that were reserved for the black slaves or white trash workers; she further confuses her color identity as she, for a time, leads the life of a field hand. Mardy Condé criticizes this very idea of the Southern woman taking over the plantation as a stereotype of Southern literature: “In each novel the heroine takes over the plantation and wages war against poverty, and marauding Yankees” (212).

However, there is a softer, more feminine side of Scarlett, and it is this side that gives the reader the feeling that she keeps marrying because she cannot find her perfect man, even when he is right in front of her face. This situation is almost painfully obvious the first time she sets eyes on Rhett Butler: “[H]er eyes fell on a stranger, standing alone in the hall, staring at her in a cool impertinent way that brought her up sharply with a mingled feeling of feminine pleasure that she had attracted a man and an embarrassed sensation that her dress was too low in the bosom” (Mitchell 134). The reader sees what Scarlett does not for several hundred pages: that she has an instant connection to Rhett, but she is too immature and fixated on her idea of the perfect man to take heed of her initial reaction to the dark, handsome stranger at the Wilkes’ barbeque.

Thus, Scarlett looks for love in all the wrong places and in men who cannot give it to her like Ashley, missing her chance to be a young woman who blossoms naturally into her own mental and sexual maturity. She is so obsessed with this one person that she sees as exactly what she wants in a man in every respect that she misses her chances to find real, fulfilling love and satisfied happiness early in her life. It is this obsession with the pale, intellectual, weak person of Ashley that keeps Scarlett from embracing her rich, internal blackness from her childhood. As the

reader sees in the novel, it is the dark, almost exotic rebellion of Rhett's that calls to Scarlett's dark passion, and eventually makes her realize that he embodies all of the adult romance she had longed for. This useless fixation on Ashley Wilkes happens to be both the one thing Rhett points out to Scarlett most often and the thing that bothers him most about her. He only admits this sentiment to Melanie Hamilton when Scarlett falls down the stairs and miscarries her first wanted baby, which was conceived in a night of savage passion with Rhett; he wanted her to have the same besotted, obsessive passion for him as she holds for Ashley: "I was mad, crazy with jealousy. She never cared for me and I thought I could make her care. But she never cared. She doesn't love me. She never has" (Mitchell 1348). Both Rhett and Scarlett have a fiery passion for one another, but they miss the chance to be really in love with each other because they lack an ability to confront each other and communicate their real emotions in the white society. Their miscommunication is just another part of their mixed-up identities, like Scarlett with her inability to fit into the mold of rich, white woman, and Rhett's inability to act as a rich, socially proper, white Southern man. However, it is also Rhett who, while encouraging Scarlett to be rebellious and accept her true nature, pulls her back into the role of the gentle, Southern woman by selling her business and setting her up in a big house to be domestic and a mother. Together, Rhett and Scarlett fulfill the role of rebels, retaliating against society, much like the black slaves did during the Pre-Civil War slave rebellions. Scarlett is too guarded to allow herself to drop the immature, fantasy version of Ashley she thinks she loves and fall into the reality of a loving, equal relationship with someone who cares for, challenges, and sees the real, socially confused woman in her.

Unlike Scarlett and Rhett, Janie's love affair with Tea Cake is fast and gentle, going from their first meeting to running away to the Florida Everglades to live and work in a relatively short space of time. Tea Cake flirts with her and pursues her until they are both completely besotted with one another and feel unable to exist

without the other. Tea Cake is also a good deal younger than Janie, and their love is fresh and tender, which is unlike the relationships she had with her previous two husbands. Tea Cake is a part of Janie's pear tree metaphor, instead of being a creature that uses the tree and its fruit for his own gain: "[O]nly Tea Cake – with Woods for a last name – and Janie, who at the chronological end of the novel sees her life 'like a great tree in a leaf' (20), experience the kind of relationship imagined in the pear tree and appear as the racially and sexually vibrant, 'undiminished human beings' (85)" (Meisenhelder 64).

Like Scarlett, Janie's first marriage is one of convenience, but unlike Scarlett, her marriage to Logan Killicks is more of an arranged, loveless marriage to a much older man. Nanny, her grandmother, arranges the match to keep Janie out of what she sees as the trouble that Janie's mother got into as opposed to someone for whom Janie has real, strong emotions. In Nanny's eyes, Logan also offers economic stability, elevating the young girl to the white woman's position on the porch. He is a cranky man whom Janie leaves because he treats her more as property, a mule, and an aid to tending his fields than a treasured and beloved wife. Her marriage to Logan pulls her out of her childhood and into the role of the protected, cared-for wife. As their time living together after the wedding goes on, he treats her more and more like a servant and worker on his land, and even when she works the fields with him and says if they bought another mule, she could help him get twice as much work done, he bullies her into quieting down and taking his orders. Her life with Logan is not a happy one, and after she asks him what he would do if she left him for another man, she leaves him for the smooth-talking Jody Starks.

Jody takes Janie away from the rough life of Logan's farm and builds her a town from the ground up with her on his arm, treating her as a rich, powerful white man would treat his wife: like one of his pretty possessions to showcase his social status. As a result, the marriage does not contain the happiness that Janie desires. Janie does not yet fit into the role of a black woman, and at the same time, she is not

happy as the white woman she identified with as a child. She is torn between the two worlds created by her conception. In this way, Janie has unintentionally put herself right back in the same position she was in with Logan instead of escaping her life as a servant and possession. It is only after she has been freed from the marriage by Jody's death that she can be physically and emotionally herself and explore her own desires, both sexually and socially. She does so by running the store on her own, letting her long hair down from its scarf and getting romantically involved with Tea Cake.

Furthermore, an interesting fact about the first marriages of Janie and Scarlett is that they are relatively short, acting as stepping-stones to the next part of the women's lives. For example, Scarlett is married, widowed, and a mother all in under a year. While Janie is not overtly or intentionally manipulative, she wants much more than her first husband can give to her, so she leaves him behind like that part of her life never happened, and she begins anew by moving onto what she thinks will be a more exciting life with Jody, possibly one that will help her locate her identity as a black woman. When Jody dies, after an unhappy period in their marriage where he resents getting older faster than Janie does, Janie finds Tea Cake. Tea Cake puts a dash of excitement back into her life and brings back some young, fresh passion into her days. While Tea Cake does not mind being the catalysts for Janie's new self-awareness, and while he allows Janie to use him to expand and explore herself, he gently demands to be treated equally with her and help her on her way to self-exploration, creating her first experience with what she has always desired: a marriage of equals. He ushers her into moving away from identifying with the white part of her genetics and instead coming into the black genes she gets from her mother. She uses their love to get out of the town that Jody built and explore more of the country, specifically the Florida Everglades, even though it is there that Tea Cake beats her, treating her as the mule she was raised not to be. This is intended to prove his dominance, and in the odd way that Janie sees it, his love for

her. "Equating light skin with passive female victimization and blackness with defiance, the men on the Muck express admiration...for Tea Cake's assertion of dominance" (Meisenhelder 73). Janie is agreeable to this treatment because she knows he cares for her, and that by beating the whiteness out of her with his deep, ebony hand, and thus pulling her from her white lady position on the porch, he makes them equals.

Scarlett, on the other hand, is obviously, to the reader, manipulative of all of the men around her who allow it; she blatantly uses them to get what she wants and to move around in society. "Though Mitchell's Scarlett more overtly combines protofeminist, strong-willed determination than does her plantation-romance predecessor, her means and ends reflect those of the belles a century earlier: with the unspoken offer of her body, Scarlett manipulates men into acting for her benefit" (Jordan-Lake 142). She uses Charles Hamilton to try and hurt Ashley, and after he dies, she uses Rhett Butler to make her mourning period more entertaining. After the war, she takes her marriage to Frank Kennedy as a business contract, and once she's rid of him, she almost immediately agrees to marry Rhett Butler for the lifestyle and money he can give her.

Both women are in control of their feminine wiles and use them to their advantage, whether the use is intentional or not. However, if one examines the attitudes set forth about Southern women, and using the idea that behind every man is a woman doing all the work and controlling the daily life of a household and giving the men the credit that they need to keep their sense of inflated masculinity, then both Scarlett and Janie act as exemplary models of strong, Southern women.

Ellen O'Hara, Scarlett's mother, exemplifies this idea in almost every action she performs as an iconic southern woman:

The man owned property, and the women managed it. The man took the credit for the management, and the woman praised his cleverness. The man roared like a bull when a splinter was in his

fingers, and the woman muffled the moans of childbirth, lest she disturb him. Men were rough of speech and often drunk. Women ignored the lapses of speech and put the drunkards to bed without bitter words. Men were rude and outspoken, women were always kind, gracious and forgiving. (Mitchell 80)

Women, regardless of color, followed this idea that women were always tolerant and aware of how the men in their care felt, in spite of how detrimental this behavior and acquiescence was to themselves.

Interestingly, by the end of the novels, both women lose the love they struggled through much adversity and self-discovery to locate. Janie kills Tea Cake in self-defense after he contracts rabies while saving her from a rabid dog during the hurricane and tries to kill her. Just as Scarlett has the epiphany that she loves him, Rhett walks out on her with the immortal and often quoted line: “My dear, I don’t give a damn” (Mitchell 1446). It is their own stubbornness to show emotions for one another that is their downfall, and Rhett leaves the woman he has worked many years to bring out. Janie shoots Tea Cake then walks back to the town she built with Jody, carrying on with her life where she left off before their love affair. Rhett leaves Scarlett standing in their elaborate mansion in Atlanta, and she may say that she will deal with the problem of his loss tomorrow, but she will carry on indefinitely and take care of herself, her two remaining children, and Tara plantation. Janie grows to be a stronger woman through the experience of death and returns to the land she left behind. Scarlett regains control of her strength when her real feelings are rebuffed and returns to the land she was born on to regain her strength. Both women return to their roots to get back up and fight again, embracing their new and vibrant identities. Janie accepts the fierce strength of her blackness, and Scarlett accepts her position as an adult, white woman who must use her own strength to care for those who need her, both knowing that they will never be able to fit in fully with the women in their level of society. These two are like a yin-yang, and have the touch of

the other woman in her that will always be a part of her personality: Scarlett with the toughness akin to that of the black slaves who labored in the field, and Janie with a touch of the high-born white, societal ideals that Jody and Nanny desperately wanted for her. Both of these women deal with situations throughout the course of their novels that would have broken lesser women, bringing them closer together in personalities than one would initially think after just a cursory reading of the books.

Strength epitomizes the iconic Southern woman, and by this definition, Janie and Scarlett are the perfect women to carry on after the loss of their loves. This woman of grit is always tender, always attentive, always caring for her family and those who need her, while putting her own fears, concerns, and problems aside to get through; she has grit. Grit means being a lady on the outside, gentle and tender, and hard as nails on the inside, ready to deal with any situation God or nature sends her way. Scarlett has grit because she realizes she can no longer act like a child, and she takes over the responsibilities of Tara. Janie has grit because she carries on after murdering the love of life.

Female strength and passion to survive are evident in the two scenes where Scarlett and Janie shoot a man. The situations under which the two women fire the rifles are different however, the act of protecting oneself or others against a man who is potentially dangerous is a telling moment about the strength of these women. Janie shoots Tea Cake to protect herself as he tries to kill her while under the influence of a neural disease:

She threw up the barrel of the rifle in frenzied hope and fear. Hope that he'd see it and run, desperate fear for her life...The pistol and the rifle rang out almost together. The pistol just enough after the rifle to seem its echo. Tea Cake crumples as his bullet buries itself in the joist over Janie's head. Janie saw the look on his face and leaped forward as he crashed forward into her arms. She was trying to hover him as he closed his teeth in the flesh of her forearm. They

came down heavily like that. Janie struggled to a sitting position and pried the dead Tea Cake's teeth from her arm. (Hurston 184)

Tea Cakes' death is a dramatic scene in the novel, and Janie's grit is beautifully illustrated by the last words of the quote where she pulls Tea Cake's teeth from their sunken position in her arm. While she is in physical and emotional pain, she keeps going, doing what she needs to do for herself, even if it is forcing the teeth of her lover's corpse out of the wound he inflicted on her as she shot him.

Scarlett, on the other hand, shoots a Yankee intruder who tries to steal from Tara the hard-earned food and her mother's sewing box, and who threatens her and the safety of those under her protection, including her sisters, who are recovering from typhoid, Melanie, who is weak from a difficult childbirth, and the house servants like Mammy:

Like lightning, she shoved her weapon over the banisters and into the startled bearded face. Before he could even fumble at his belt, she pulled the trigger...The man crashed backwards to the floor, sprawling into the dining room with a violence that shook the furniture...Yes, he was dead. Undoubtedly. She had killed a man....She had killed a man, she who took care never to be in at the kill on a hunt, she who could not bear the squealing of a hog at slaughter or the squeak of a rabbit in a snare. (Mitchell 610-11)

Scarlett, who at this point in the novel has just begun to show the reader that she is not as selfish as she first appears, is horrified that she could actually murder another human being, but she had to do it for the safety of the family. The Yankee thief enters at the moment when Scarlett has a festering foot wound and is alone in the house with three sick women and helpless babies. She slays a man to protect herself and them, and like Janie, she keeps going, cleaning up the blood. Melanie helps her by lying to the women and babies upstairs, stating that the pistol went off while Scarlett cleaned it, so that no one else but Melanie and Scarlett know that murder has

been committed in the house. Scarlett moves on with her day to keep the rest of the household safely in the dark about the real dangers of their lives.

Janie protects the greater community from a dangerous Tea Cake. Scarlett protects a plantation from an intruder. They both choose to protect themselves and the people in their care instead of submitting to the mental chaos that normally would have been expected of a gentlewoman who needs a man's care to survive. They save themselves instead of bowing to adversity. It takes grit to shoot a man, especially one who is loved by the shooter, but these women do what they have to do, with little concern for their own safety, which is a rarity for Scarlett at least.

When considering the internal strength of Southern women, regardless of race, one must also consider the men who influence them. It is obvious in both novels that men, while the stories differ on how the female characters react to and treat them, are influential on the behavior of the women. Without Tea Cake, Janie would never have left the town and experienced a scorching love. Without Rhett, Scarlett never would have allowed herself to be free of the constricting traditions that surrounded mourning during the period. Without men, the women have no one to control gently and use to get what needs to get done, finished. These men are obvious matches for Janie and Scarlett because of some of their specific personality and physical similarities. Rhett is muscular and strong, with dark features, much like Scarlett who is mentally strong and willful, and has the dark wildness to her personality that reflects in Rhett. Tea Cake's wildness and strength calls to Janie's personality, helping her to embrace her mental identity as a black woman instead of trying to force herself into the role of the white woman that everyone has pushed her towards her entire existence. While it is obvious that the two specific women under scrutiny are entirely capable of independence, it is also obvious that they enjoy the company of men and still want to have the tender, loving aspects of life that come with marriage. It is also interesting that as the final romantic interests of the two novels, the men cannot be controlled, Rhett because he understands Scarlett too well

and will not let her, and Tea Cake because he puts Janie on a level of equality with himself, even teaching her to use a gun, thus making her feel secure and like she does not need to try and control him, only care for him. This is a similar goal for both men. They want a wife that appreciates them, yet is also independent of them.

In *Gone with the Wind*, the idea of a woman having grit goes along with the definition of a woman that Mitchell puts forth in her tome. Ellen O'Hara, Scarlett's mother, offers perhaps the best definition of a Southern woman when the narrator talks about her life: "Ellen's life was not easy, nor was it happy, but she did not expect life to be easy, and if it was not happy, that was a woman's lot. It was a man's world, and she accepted it as such" (Mitchell 80). However, using this quote as the definition of what a woman can expect from life as a Southern lady in a truly misogynistic society, it is Janie who comes out on top and fits into the role. Janie is gentle, cooperative, and willing to follow the lead of the man in her life at any given point, so by definition, Janie is a Southern belle, demure and attentive to the needs of her man. This fact is interesting because it means that Janie, who comes from a black, slave mother and a white, slave-owning father, is better suited to the life of a belle than Scarlett, who was born into the role, because she had a willingness to conform to her role in life, whatever it may be. Hurston even begins her novel with this very reasoning, telling the reader that Janie did not even know she was black until shown a picture of herself playing with the white children from the house where her grandmother worked:

Ah was wid dem white chillun so much till Ah didn't know Ah wuzn't white till round six years old. Wouldn't have found it out then, but a man come along takin' pictures and without askin' anybody, Shelby, dat was de oldest boy, he told him to take us...So when we looked at de picture and everybody got pointed out there wasn't nobody left except a real dark little girl with long hair standing by Eleanor. Dat's where Ah wuz s'posed to be, but Ah couldn't

recognize dat dark chile as me. So Ah ask, 'where is me? Ah don't see me'. (Hurstons 8)

Janie struggles along in her childhood and adolescence because of her lack of identity; she is stuck in between, straining to find an identity while she lives in two different worlds because of her light skin. Susan Edwards Meisenhelder said it best in her book *Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick: Race and Gender in the Works of Zora Neale Hurston*: "Janie struggles between two identities in the novel, one...drawn from the white world and foisted upon her and a more vigorous model of black womanhood she tries to forge for herself" (62). In her upbringing, Janie only has a model for what an adult, white woman is supposed to be, but she has no strong, black women to look up to because of her familial situation and background.

In the same idea, Scarlett experiences this role reversal in childhood as well. To the displeasure of Mammy, she spends much of her childhood time playing with the boys and the slaves: "To Mammy's indignation, her [Scarlett's] preferred playmates were not her demure sisters or the well-brought-up Wilkes girls but the negro children on the plantation and the boys of the neighborhood" (Mitchell 81). Janie takes Scarlett's childhood role as a lady-in-training by playing with the genteel, little girls of the manor house where her grandmother works, and Scarlett takes what would have been Janie's place on the plantation and plays with the slave children and boys, ignoring the rules of little ladies. Scarlett is free to run around the plantation and play with whomever she likes because she is the eldest O'Hara daughter, and her mother knows that from playmates can come future husbands. She rides horses with her father while her sisters play sweet, little girl games with each other and the other plantation belles, while Scarlett, at least until she hits puberty, is a tomboy. Janie is a more submissive person than Scarlett, so she is treated as a playmate by the manor house children, but she knows that she will get equal punishment if the group of children gets in trouble for something; therefore, she is an equal to the white

children in theory. Janie is also light skinned and Scarlett is repeatedly described as dark.

The parallel between these two very different women is their strong personalities and ability to control their situations through manipulation or veiled cooperation with men. Again, each woman's ability to manipulate misogynistic male society comes into play. At points in the two novels, each female character runs a business, and in Scarlett's case, she does it better than her husband, who founded and owns the company. Janie helps Jody run the small convenience store that he sets up in the middle of town. This store is also the center of all social gathering, get-togethers, and gossip sessions for the people of the town. Thus, it is an influential place to be on an almost constant basis, which Janie is, since Jody would rather chat with the neighbors on the porch while playing checkers than do the work with Janie, treating her as an equal and not just one of his employees. Even after Jody's death, the store is the spot to be when anything interesting happens in town. The store is also where Tea Cake meets and commences courting Janie by inviting her to play checkers with him while the town is at the baseball game: "She found herself glowing inside. Somebody wanted her to play. Somebody thought it natural for her to play...She looked him over and got little thrills from every one of his good points" (Hurston 96).

Scarlett forces her second husband, Frank Kennedy, out of his own business after discovering while he is ill that he has terrible business sense and loans money to his friends without having the backbone to ask for repayment. Scarlett becomes a vicious businesswoman, which surprises even herself: "A startling thought this, that a woman could handle business matters as well as or better than a man, a revolutionary thought to Scarlett who had been reared in the tradition that men were omniscient and women none too bright" (Mitchell 863). This is one of Scarlett's big steps into female independence and modern ways of thinking that scandalize those members of Old Atlanta society. Additionally, this is also the first move towards shaking the

establishment that Scarlett makes without the prodding of Rhett, making it wholly her own thoughts and efforts. This business is Scarlett trying her hand in the men-only world of Reconstruction Atlanta, Georgia, and she does so while pregnant with her second child. Running the sawmill is one of the very few independent things that Rhett discourages in Scarlett, even though it is partially his doing that she had enough gumption to even consider doing something so unladylike as running a business.

Because Scarlett marries Frank for the tax money to save Tara, her attachment to the land of her family plantation is made glaringly obvious to the reader. She does not even make her home there anymore, and yet Scarlett has such a strong compulsion to care for it and keep her family in ownership of it, that she goes to great lengths to save it from the tax collectors and carpetbaggers. Scarlett's mother and father rear her with a deep personal and ancestral love of land, as her father tells her early on in the novel: "Land is the only thing in the world that amounts to anything...for 'tis the only thing in this world that lasts, and don't you be forgetting it! 'Tis the only thing worth working for, worth fighting for—worth dying for" (Mitchell 49). The fact that these words from Gerald O'Hara haunt Scarlett every time something changes in her life or she needs to gain strength to keep going shows how close she is to the nature that she came from, like Eve and Adam from the dust of the ground.

Analogous to Scarlett's affinity to the land, Janie's existence is rooted in natural imagery, and the further she moves towards the natural world, the happier and healthier her existence becomes, beginning with the biggest and clearest reference of how she is like a pear tree: "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" (Hurston 11). Literally, Janie compares herself to a blossoming tree. She is young and waiting desperately for life to begin, much like Scarlett does while she

hones her man-hunting skills on the boys of the plantations. The pear tree reference is used for not only Janie, but as an accurate reason for why none of the men in Janie's life can work out for her as happy marital unions. Tea Cake is the only one of any of the men who is also associated with natural images, like Janie's pear tree. The tree is a symbol for Janie's burgeoning sexual and spiritual growth into womanhood, and thus without being associated with the bursting joy of spring, none of the other men could ever have kept up with Janie's thirst for growth, change, and beauty. This connection with nature draws Janie to him, getting her near enough to notice his egalitarian nature, which is something she has never experienced previously in a male partner.

One strong connection that Janie and Scarlett have to one another is that they both, in their search to find love, happiness, and stability, run into the problem of male domination. True, both novels take place in traditionally male-dominated societies and at times where women were quiet, meek creatures who followed directions and stayed in the home. The problem with this idea of femininity is that both of these female characters are searching for freedom. They are not traditional women, and thus they require non-traditional men to make their lives happy and complete. Margaret Mitchell points this out when her narrator says, "Men and women, they were beautiful and wild, all a little violent under their pleasant ways and only a little tamed" (Mitchell 146). Rhett and Tea Cake, as they prove by Rhett causing Scarlett to tumble down the stairs and Tea Cake beating Janie because he's jealous of another man, are just as wild and unconventional as their female counterparts, which is why their relationships work.

It is interesting to note that, socially speaking, these novels were written in a time of change, the Great Depression, that fell during the development of the feminist movement into the postfeminist movement, meaning that the novels combine elements of both social movements, and thus the authors created female characters who would speak to women involved in both. As author Paula Anca

Farca says, “Mitchell teaches her readers that women’s happiness depends on their freedom, strength, public success, marriage, and motherhood” (1). While this author talks about Mitchell and Scarlett, the article’s point also applies to Hurston and Janie as well, because of the period of writing and publication. It is not just that Janie and Scarlett are racially confused in their personal identities, but it is that they must represent to themselves and the world an image of a strong woman who is also happy with her life and decisions. This desire of women to break out from under the feet of men and become equals in turn makes Janie and Scarlett equal because of their mixed identities. They both represent the desire to be equal and free of misogyny, regardless of their real or figurative race, and to have the chance to create their own identities, which is something unavailable in the world of male domination: “Mythic and essential, women have no room to create an identity of their own, one that defines themselves beyond patriarchal stereotypes such as the dutiful wife, the saintly mother, the innocent virgin, the beautiful temptress, or the evil witch” (Farca 1).

Both Scarlett and Janie deflect society’s attempts to press them like dried flowers, squelching their desires to blossom and grow the way they want. However, they do allow the men they actually love to guide them along the path of self-enlightenment. Tea Cake gently guides Janie away from the life of the white, plantation wife. He helps her to find her way from straddling two worlds into accepting those elements of her personality that she gained from the whiteness in her background and mingles them with the intense strength of the black woman. Tea Cake uses his own racial identity to prod Janie into self-actualization.

In the same way, Rhett uses his influence to push Scarlett into a more socially acceptable version of herself. He takes her from strong-willed tomboy, masquerading as a placid Southern belle, and helps her to find the white and subtly black components of her personality. He turns her into a more overtly rebellious woman who acts determined in her efforts to infiltrate the world of men and still be

considered a fashionable, traditional woman. Rhett forces Scarlett to accept those elements of her personality that make her black, much as Tea Cake forces Janie to accept those elements that make her white. The male lovers aid in finding the balance of personality that both fits their women and fits into the social roles that those women fulfill.

In the end, both Scarlett and Janie reflect elements of their racial backgrounds, both having grown up with two different races of people. However, they did not grow up in the same setting, since Scarlett was in the position of power over those black children with which she played, and Janie was the child of a servant in the house of the white children with whom she played. Janie discovers her blackness at the end of Hurston's novel, but she also comes to accept the power that she has by being part of more than one world in her lifetime. Scarlett discovers the freedom exposed by the black elements of her feisty, Irish personality, but she also accepts the strict social constraints that a white, Atlanta woman must follow. However, she never fully accepts her role and instead creates her own version of propriety. Both authors wrote their novels as commentary on the state of women, both black and white, in the American South after the change brought on by the Civil War. In this period of feminist growth and change, portraying such similar protagonists, coming from two extremely different backgrounds, are radical examples of female freedom through accepting one's role in life and changing it to fit. While Scarlett may be creamy pale and Janie may be the color of milky coffee, they each share the elements that make them radical, feminist examples. They are strong, vibrant characters, who choose through experience to grow and change as naturally as a pear tree in spring. They prove that it is not the race but acceptance of one's self that truly makes a Southern woman a woman. Janie and Scarlett run parallel to each other in such a plethora of ways that one can easily accept each scenario as two radical parts of one whole story on the growth of women. Outwardly they may be different, but in any critical conversation, the reader must

remember that a part of Janie will always be white and a part of Scarlett will always be black.

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