

Early Twentieth-Century Fiction
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Prof. Andrew Goldstone (andrew.goldstone@rutgers.edu)

(Murray 019, Mondays 2:30–4:30)

CA: Evan Dresman (evan.dresman@rutgers.edu)

(36 Union St. 217, Wednesdays 12:00–2:00)

November 24, 2014. Hurston (3).

housekeeping

- ▶ papers due on Sakai Assignments at 5 p.m.
- ▶ 3.0 ceiling for late papers through Wednesday

assignment on blog

By Sunday at 5 p.m.

Write a blog entry with short notations (a few words) about four works we have read in relation to a single specific theme, device, problem, or pattern. Note the dates of the works as well. Then write at least three sentences about the literary-historical trajectory you see: continuity? sudden change? gradual evolution? opposing tendencies? Base your observations not on personal impressions but on evidence.

review: language and power

- ▶ linguistic creativity of the community: live orality
- ▶ coercive language: group voice, spoken authority
- ▶ Janie must speak for herself
- ▶ Hurston: one of “them”? one of “us”? (representativeness)
- ▶ decorum, dialect, writing for/from the folk: she isn't playing

(symbolic) violence

“Evenin, Mis’ Starks. Could yuh lemme have uh pound uh knuckle puddin’* till Saturday. Ah’m sho tuh pay yuh then.”

“You needs ten pounds, Mr. Tea Cake. Ah’ll let yuh have all Ah got and you needn’t bother ’bout payin’ it back.”

*A beating with the fist. (98)

reader's position (I)

74/Ms.

IN SEARCH OF
ZORA NEALE HURSTON
BY ALICE WALKER



On January 16, 1959, Zora Neale Hurston, suffering from the effects of a stroke and writing painfully in long-hand, composed a letter to the "editorial department" of Harper & Brothers inquir-

three hundred brown skins, three hundred good swimmers, plenty guavas, two schools, and no jailhouse." Of course I cannot see the guavas, but the five lakes are still there, and it is the lakes I

reader's position (2)

“I am Zora Neale Hurston’s niece, and I would like to have a marker put on her grave...”

By this time I am, of course, completely into being Zora’s niece, and the lie comes with perfect naturalness to my lips. Besides, as far as I’m concerned, she is my aunt—and that of all black people as well. (Walker, 78)

reader's position (3)

But the “circle” [on the mortician’s map of the gravesite] is over an acre large and looks more like an abandoned field. Tall weeds choke the dirt road and scrape against the sides of the car....

“I don’t know about y’all,” I say, “but I don’t even believe this.”...This neglect is staggering. (Walker, 79)

reader's position (4)

“She *didn't* have a pauper's funeral!” he [Dr. Benton, who knew ZNH] says with great heat. “Everybody around here *loved* Zora.”

“We just came back from ordering a headstone,” I say quietly...“but to tell the truth I can't be positive what I found is the grave. All I know is the spot I found was the only grave-size hole in the area.”...

“Do the weeds still come up to your knees?”

“And beyond,” I murmur. This time there isn't any doubt. Dr. Benton feels ashamed. (Walker, 87)

how to canonize your aunt

BOOKS IN PRINT

Zora's papers can be found in the library at the University of Florida in Gainesville, and in the James Weldon Johnson Collection, Beinecke Library, Yale University. (A biography of Zora, by Robert Hem-enway of the University of Kentucky, will be published late this year.)

Jonah's Gourd Vine, J. B. Lippincott Co., 1971: hardcover, \$5.95; paperback, \$2.95. (A novel, originally published in 1934.)

Their Eyes Were Watching God, a Fawcett Premier Book, Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1972: paperback, 95 cents. (Originally published in 1937, this novel is Hurston's masterpiece.)

Mules and Men, Harper & Row Perennial Library, Harper & Row Publishers, 1970: paperback, \$1.50. (Originally published in 1935, this book is a folklore classic.)

Dust Tracks on a Road, J. B. Lippincott Co., 1971: hardcover, \$5.95; paperback, \$2.95. (Originally published in 1942, this is Hurston's autobiography.)

BOOKS NOT IN PRINT

(but check public libraries)

Moses, Man of the Mountain (novel), J. B. Lippincott Co., 1939.

Tell My Horse (folklore), J. B. Lippincott Co., 1938.

Seraph on the Suwanee (novel), Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948.

Walker, 89. Page image: Douglass Library, Rutgers

norms of reading

“Lawd!” Pheoby breathed out heavily, “Ah done growed ten feet higher from jus’ listenin’ tuh you, Janie. Ah ain’t satisfied wid mahself no mo’. Ah means tuh make Sam take me fishin’ wid him after this. Nobody better not criticize yuh in mah hearin’.”

“Now, Pheoby, don’t feel too mean wid de rest of ’em ’cause dey’s parched up from not knowin’ things.” (192)

Short discussion

What aspects of Pheoby’s reaction (and Janie’s reaction to her reaction) suggest *norms* for reading? How do you know?

affirmation?

The thing made itself into pictures and hung around Janie's bedside all night long. Anyhow, she wasn't going back to Eatonville to be laughed at and pitied. She had ten dollars in her pocket and twelve hundred in the bank. But oh God, don't let Tea Cake be off somewhere hurt and Ah not know nothing about it. And God, please suh, don't let him love nobody else but me. (120)

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Please, Jesus, don't let them nasty niggers hurt her boy. If they do, Master Jesus, grant her a good gun and a chance to shoot 'em. Tea Cake had a knife it was true, but that was only to protect hisself. God knows, Tea Cake wouldn't harm a fly. (126)

which side is Hurston's narrator on?

Real gods require blood. (145)

No brutal beating at all. He just slapped her around a bit to show he was boss. (147)

“Ah beat her to show dem Turners who is boss.” (148)

Discussion (write for 5 minutes, then talk)

How should we interpret the violence of Tea Cake towards Janie? Consider her self-defense as well. What is the feminist reading? Argue from textual evidence.

which side is Hurston's plot on?

Female *Bildungsroman* but

- ▶ re-marriage
- ▶ no reproductivity
- ▶ property—a social loop-the-loop instead of a rise or fall
- ▶ extended middle age

next

another social vision

September 16, 1928:

Okeechobee Hurricane, having already hit the Caribbean, killing 300 in Puerto Rico, hits Florida

optional reading

Martyn Bone essay (linked from online syllabus)