

Early Twentieth-Century Fiction

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November 27, 2017. Tagore (I).

review: challenges to judgment

“Dey gointuh make ‘miration ’cause mah love didn’t work lak they love, if dey ever had any. Then you must tell ’em dat love ain’t something’ lak uh grindstone dat’s de same thing everywhere and do de same thing tuh everything it touch. Love is lak de sea.” (191)

review: Hurston and the hurricane

- ▶ historical precision, but not a chronicle
- ▶ “natural” disaster reveals social division
- ▶ segregation not immutable but coercively enforced
- ▶ injustice registered in wry or muted tones
- ▶ Hurston’s affirmation?
 - ▶ a black world, diverse and in conflict
 - ▶ margins of the margins: Janie at home on the edge

remaking the reader

“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’.” (192)

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

Ms. 3 (March, 1975): 74. Page image: Douglass Library, Rutgers.

parallel histories

1891 Tagore, *poṣṭmāṣṭār*

1892 Conan Doyle, *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*

1893 James, “The Middle Years”

1895 Tagore, *kṣudhita pāṣān*

1916 Joyce, *Portrait*

1916 Tagore, *Hungry Stones and Other Stories*

1918 Tagore, *Mashi and Other Stories*

1921 Woolf, *Monday or Tuesday*

1923 Toomer, *Cane*

1923 Sayers, *Whose Body?*

1929 Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

1929 Hammett, *Maltese Falcon*

1930 Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*

1937 Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

comparative discussion

- ▶ What does “The Postmaster” have in common with Toomer and Hurston? Make specific comparisons (name particular sections of Toomer).

modernity

There was an indigo factory near by, and the proprietor, an Englishman, had managed to get a post office established. (159)

He at once wrote off to Calcutta an application for a transfer. (165)

That the movement of the leaves and the clouds of the sky were enough to fill life with joy—such were the sentiments to which he sought to give expression. But God knows that the poor fellow would have felt it as the gift of a new life, if some genie of the Arabian Nights had in one night swept away the trees, leaves and all, and replaced them with a macadamised road, hiding the clouds from view with rows of tall houses. (160; qtd by “JB”)

what literature is Tagore part of?

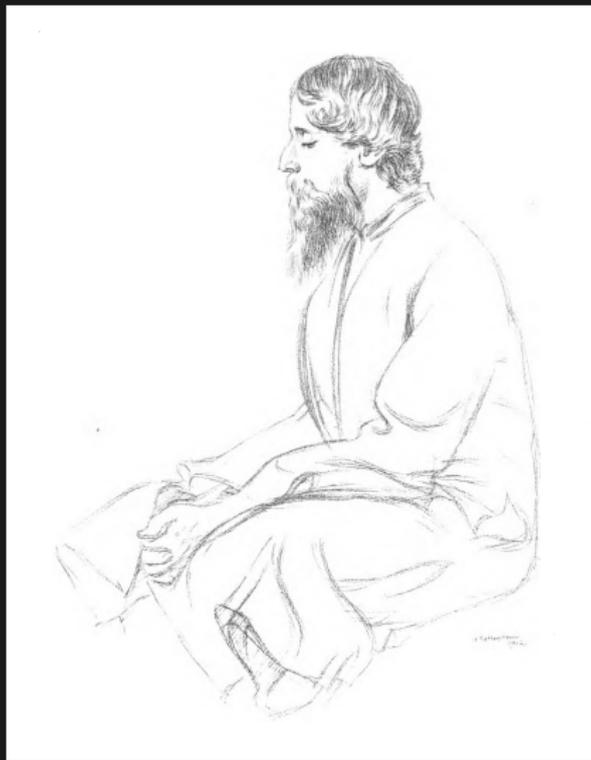
It was not at all necessary for my own reputation that I should find my place in the history of your literature. It was an accident for which you were also responsible and possibly most of all was Yeats. But yet sometimes I feel almost ashamed that I whose undoubted claim has been recognized by my countrymen to a sovereignty in our world of letters should not have waited till it was discovered by the outside world in its true majesty and environment, that I should ever go out of my way to court the attention of others having their own language for their enjoyment and use.

Letter to William Rothenstein, November 26, 1932, in *The Essential Tagore*, ed. Fakrul Alam and Radha Chakrabarthy (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2011), 119.

Thou hast made me known to friends whom I knew not. Thou hast given me seats in homes not my own. Thou hast brought the distant near and made a brother of the stranger.

I am uneasy at heart when I have to leave my accustomed shelter; I forget that there abides the old in the new, and that there also thou abidest.

Gitanjali 63, trans. Tagore (London: Macmillan, 1913), 58; scan available via [HathiTrust](#). Also appeared as “Poems” I in *Poetry* I, no. 3 (December 1912): 84; scan available via [Modernist Journals Project](#).



William Rothenstein, illus. *Gitanjali: Song Offerings* (London: Macmillan, 1913), frontispiece. [HathiTrust](#).

Tagore: bare outlines

1861 b. Calcutta

1878 1st visits England

1883 m. Mrinalini Devi

1901 founds Santiniketan school

1902 wife dies

1912 *Gitanjali* (English), introduction by W.B. Yeats

1913 Nobel Prize for Literature

1915 knighted

1916 novel *The Home and the World* (Bengali, English)

1916 travels: Japan, USA

1919 returns knighthood after Amritsar massacre

1921 founds Visva-Bharati university

1941 d.

(more detail: see the [DNB](#))

Ratan ceased to be a little girl. She at once stepped into the post of mother. (164–65; qtd by “JSH,” “CG,” and “SL,” “cal55,” F.K., “Reading-HalfAsleep”)

- ▶ Does this story take Ratan’s side?

next

- ▶ “The Hungry Stones”