

Early Twentieth-Century Fiction

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(Murray 019, Tuesdays 2:30–4:30)

December 1, 2014. Hurston, concluded; Barnes (1).

logistical

- ▶ evaluations next time
- ▶ e-mail if conflicts with final exam
- ▶ “historical line” blogging exercise due next time

review: Hurston

- ▶ feminist readings
 - ▶ episode: domestic violence and tone
 - ▶ plot: the un-*Bildungsroman*
- ▶ 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

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

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

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

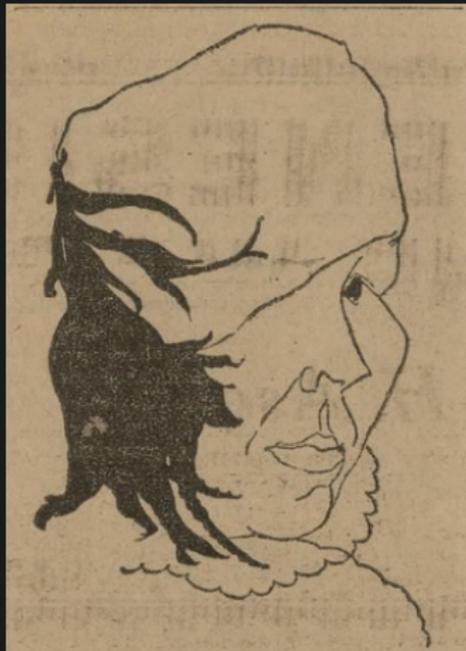
“Lawd!” Pheoby breathed out heavily, “Ah done growed ten feet higher from jus’ listenin’ tuh you, Janie. Ah ain’t satisfied wid mahself no mo’. Ah means tuh make Sam take me fishin’ wid him after this. Nobody better not criticize yuh in mah hearin’.”

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

Djuna Barnes



Paris, 1921–22. [Wikimedia Commons](#).



Self-caricature, 1923–39.
<http://hdl.handle.net/1903.1/16835>.



“How the Villagers Amuse
Themselves,” 1916. [Wikimedia
Commons.](#)



“How the Villagers Amuse
Themselves,” 1916. [Wikimedia
Commons](#).



“How It Feels To Be Forcibly Fed,”
New York World, September 6, 1914.
<http://hdl.handle.net/1903.1/5023>.

late modernism (I)

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Vanity Fair, 1922. [Wikimedia Commons](#).

readers / positions (I)

It is the whole pattern that they [the characters] form, rather than any individual constituent, that is the focus of interest.

What I would leave the reader prepared to find is the great achievement of a style, the brilliance of wit and characterisation, and a quality of horror and doom very nearly related to that of Elizabethan tragedy.

T.S. Eliot, introduction to *Nightwood* (1937), xxi–xxii.

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readers / positions (2)

Nightwood lacks a narrative structure in the ordinary sense....And these chapters are knit together, not by the progress of any action—either narrative action, or, as in a stream-of-consciousness novel, the flow of experience—but by the continual reference and cross-reference of images and symbols that must be referred to each other spatially throughout the time-act of reading.

Joseph Frank, “Spatial Form in Modern Literature” (1945), in *The Widen- ing Gyre: Crisis and Mastery in Modern Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1963), 31.

readers / positions (3)



Vanity Fair, 1922. [Wikimedia Commons](#).



1917-23.

<http://hdl.handle.net/1903.1/8669>.

readers / positions (4)

Nightwood...is not a minor Modernist masterpiece, a shadow to Joyce's *Ulysses*, but a singular undertaking that addresses woman's place in the patriarchal construct.

Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900–1940* (Austin: U. of Texas P., 1986), 266.

sympathy?

Felix...on the phrase “time crawling” broke into uncontrollable laughter....He began waving his hands, saying, “Oh, please! please!” and suddenly he had a notion that he was doing something that wasn’t laughing at all, but something much worse, though he kept saying to himself, “I am laughing, really laughing, nothing else whatsoever!” (21–22)

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The demonic laugh that he hears comes from somewhere else, a sheer alterity. It is a mirthless laugh, expressing the perplexity of Barnes and her reader, to whom every form of relation to these characters is barred but one, the laughter welling up around Felix. And yet, the position of author and reader is inscribed nowhere else than within Felix himself.

Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 1999), 62.

automatism

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discussion

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How does the narrative direct sympathy? Who does Barnes's writing make us care about? Work together to choose an example passage, and concentrate on the opening chapters.

blogging

Prompt: a historical line

Commonplace from Barnes. Now look back over your own blog entries (click on your own username) and write a paragraph linking four texts in a chronological narrative that reflects on differences or similarities as **historical change or continuity**. You can think about either intrinsic history (literature's forms, genres, methods) or extrinsic history (the more-than-literary horizon) as the frame. **Not every story is a story of progress.**