

Twentieth-Century Fiction I

November 29. Barnes, *Nightwood* (I).

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Housekeeping

Final exam

Take-home, open book, no collaboration

3 essay questions

Distributed Monday morning 12/17

Turned in by Thursday 3 p.m. 12/20

4h30 exam, spend no more than 6h

Housekeeping

Final exam

Reading Day review session canceled

Extra office hours TBA

Review

Hurston's afterlife: she comes back

Process of reestablishing or *recuperating* an author

Walker: being Zora's "niece"; "a genius of the South"

The plurality of readerly response

Wright, Locke, Walker...and Pheoby Marks

Review

Hurston: feminist questions

question of the author's point of view

embedded critique

feeling with Janie, ironizing Janie

against the female Bildungsroman

Review

Hurricane

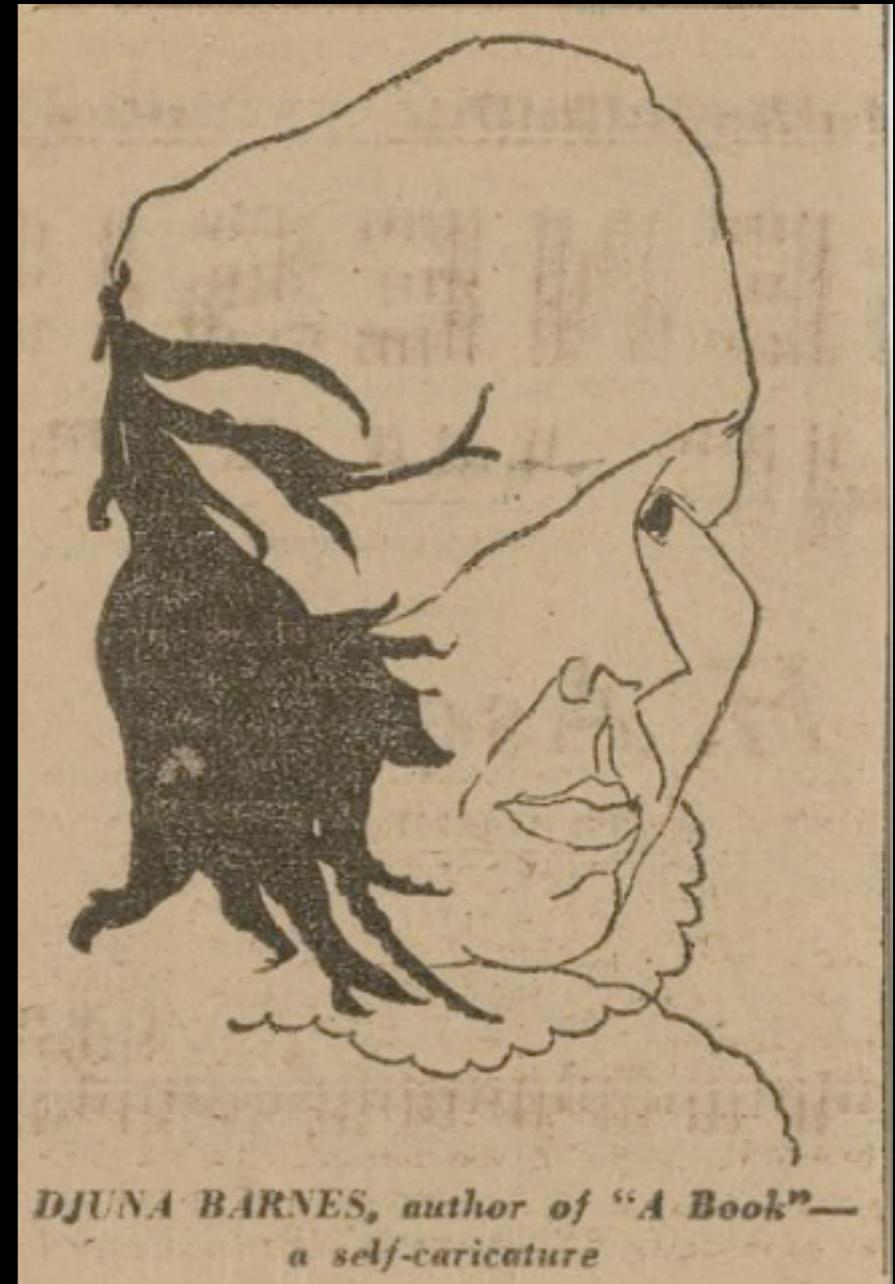
a historical Okeechobee hurricane (1928)

Hurston remembers the uncounted dead
fragmented black community, elegy for wholeness
peripheries within peripheries

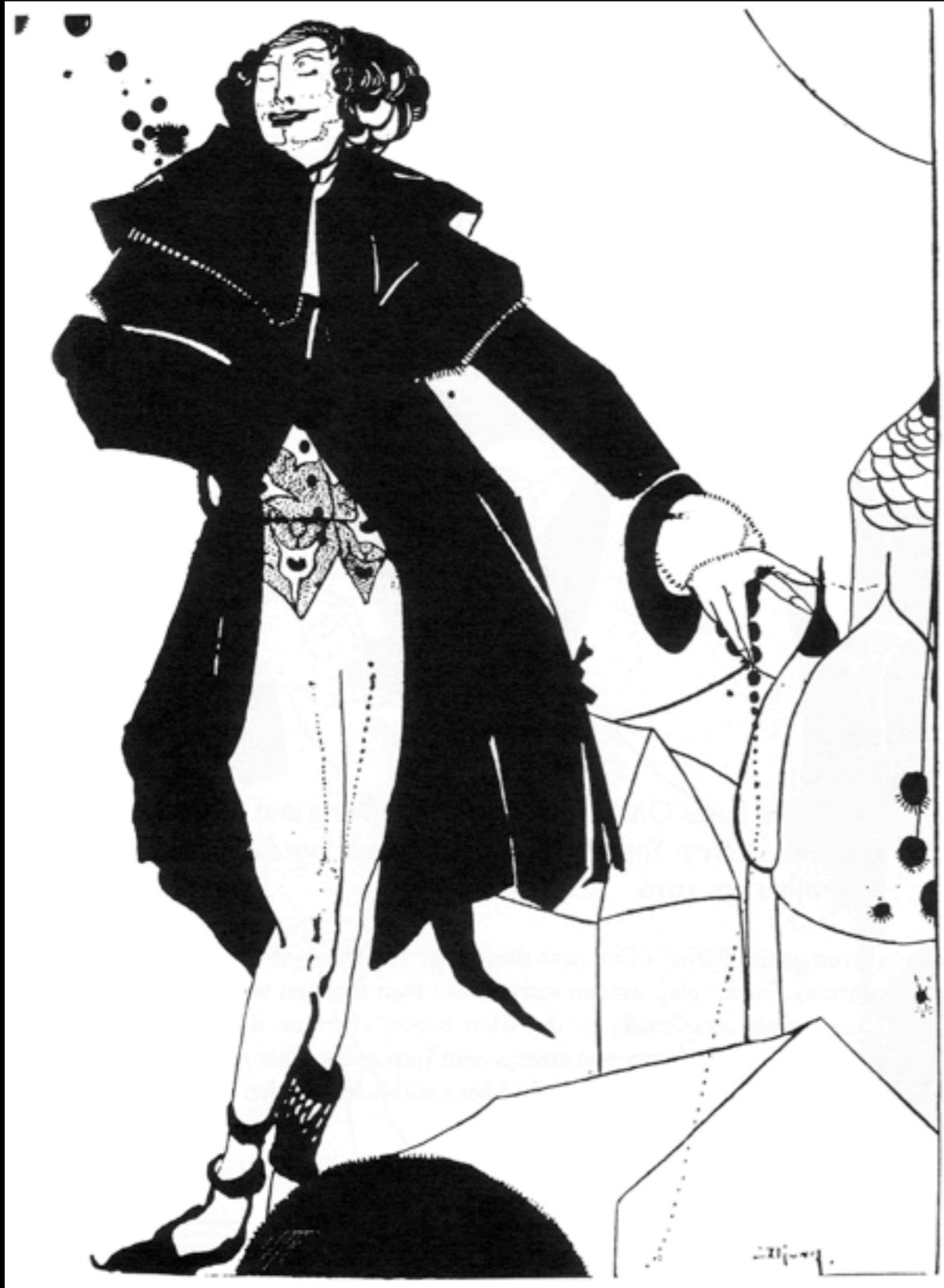
Djuna Barnes



1921–22. Wikimedia commons



1923–39. <http://hdl.handle.net/1903.1/16835>



1916. Wikimedia commons



The World Magazine, September 4, 1914
**HOW IT FEELS
TO BE FORCIBLY FED**

1914. Wikimedia commons

late modernism



Vanity Fair, 1922. Wikimedia commons



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

readers / positions

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*
(New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1937)
[these passages in *New Directions* ed., xxi–xxii]

readers / positions

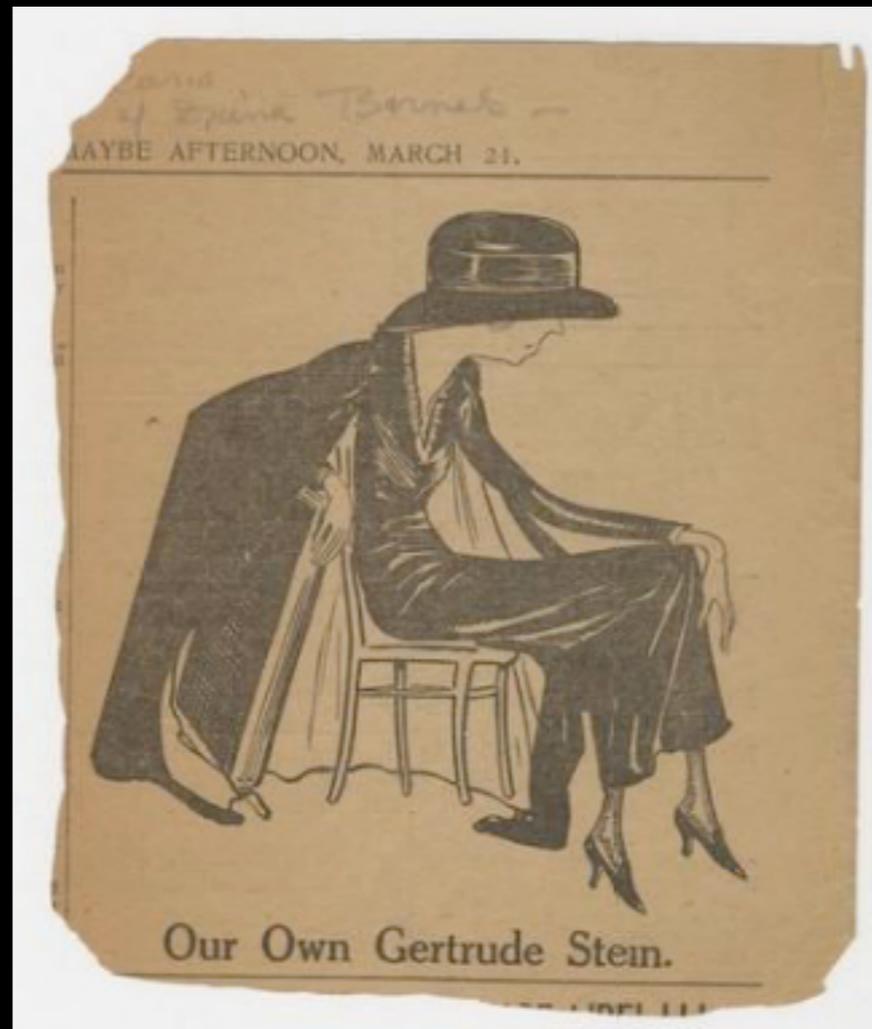
Nightwood lacks a narrative structure in the ordinary sense....And these chapters are knit together, not by the progress of any action—either narrative action, or, as in a stream-of-consciousness novel, the flow of experience—but by the continual reference and cross-reference of images and symbols that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

Joseph Frank, “Spatial Form in Modern Literature” (1945)

late modernism



Vanity Fair, 1922. Wikimedia commons



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

late modernism

“And it was then that I said that Ireland needed less small talk and more irrefutable art; and that no one-act play, be it as good as its master, could be a knock-down argument.”

He smiled as he said this, showing those strangely spoiled and appropriate teeth.

Joyce lives in a sort of accidental aloofness...He dislikes art-talk, and his friends are quite the common people.

...Here I lost all connection with this man, sad, quiet, and eternally at work.

Barnes, “Vagaries Malicieux,” *The Double Dealer* (1922)

readers / positions

[*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* (1986)

readers / positions

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)

readers / positions

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* (1999)

readers / positions

Nora said “Ah!” with the intolerable automatism of the last “Ah!” in a body struck at the moment of its final breath. (70)

One inevitably thought of her [Jenny] in the act of love emitting florid *commedia dell' arte* ejaculations; one should not have thought of her in the act of love at all. She thought of little else, and though always submitting to the act, spoke and desired the spirit of love; yet was unable to attain it. (74)

readers / positions

Discussion

How does the narrative direct sympathy? Who does Barnes's writing make us care about? Focus on particular examples, and concentrate on the opening chapters.

readers / positions

The world and its history were to Nora like a ship in a bottle; she herself was outside and unidentified, endlessly embroiled in a preoccupation without a problem. (59)

unas(simile)able

The louder she cried out the farther away went the floor below, as if Robin and she, in their extremity, were a pair of opera glasses turned to the wrong end, diminishing in their painful love; a speed that ran away with the two ends of the building, stretching her apart. (68)

unas(simile)able

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style

Her flesh was the texture of plant life, and beneath it one sensed a frame, broad, porous and sleep-worn, as if sleep were a decay fishing her beneath the visible surface. About her head there was an effulgence as of phosphorus glowing about the circumference of a body of water—as if her life lay through her in ungainly luminous deteriorations—the troubling structure of the born somnambule, who lives in two worlds—meet of child and desperado. (38)

Discussion

What are the effects of distance and unassimilability here?

teaser

gender, community, desire

desperado

the grandmother who, for some unknown reason, was dressed as a man, wearing a billycock and a corked mustache (69)

a tall girl with the body of a boy (50)

the Duchess of Broadback (Frau Mann) (15)