

## Early Twentieth-Century Fiction

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December 10, 2025. Hurston (4); course conclusion.

## coming up: final exam

- ▶ Wednesday, Dec. 17, 12:00–1:30, MU 213
- ▶ closed book
- ▶ short and medium-length answer (no long essays), some choice
- ▶ whole course, emphasizing Faulkner and after
- ▶ passages for identification and commentary
- ▶ prompts for focus literary-historical reflection
- ▶ no questions on Raja Rao :(

## review

- ▶ feminist Bildung plot, ambivalent episodes
  - ▶ “Who perceives?” as ethical question
  - ▶ communal and individual voices (again)
  - ▶ matter-of-factness about suffering
- ▶ the hurricane
  - ▶ historical precision, but not a chronicle: folkloric language
  - ▶ living with the dead (again)
  - ▶ “natural” disaster reveals social division (again)
- ▶ burying bodies and the “Jim Crow law”
  - ▶ segregation is not immutable but coercively enforced
  - ▶ it’s...something to laugh about? (again)

## title drop

They sat in company with the others in other shanties, their eyes straining against crude walls and their souls asking if He meant to measure their puny might against His. They seemed to be staring at the dark, but their eyes were watching God. (160)

## social vision (further)

The novel maps south Florida's powerful economic position within an extended Caribbean—or alternatively, an extended South—characterized by transnational migrant labor.

Martyn Bone, "The (Extended) South of Black Folk," *American Literature* 79, no. 4 (December 2007): 773.

## social vision (further)

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Since Tea Cake and Janie had friended with the Bahaman workers in the 'Glades, they, the “Saws,” [i.e., people from Nassau], had been gradually drawn into the American crowd. (155)

One of the Bahaman boys stopped by Tea Cake's house in a car and hollered....

“De crow gahn up, man.”...

“If Ah never see you no mo' on earth, Ah'll meet you in Africa.” (156)

the end?

It was the meanest moment of eternity. A minute before she was just a scared human being fighting for its life. Now she was her sacrificing self with Tea Cake's head in her lap. (184)

- How does the rest of the novel put the shooting of Tea Cake in context?

## reader's position (I)

And twelve more white men had stopped whatever they were doing to listen and pass on what happened between Janie and Tea Cake Woods, and as to whether things were done right or not. That was funny too....

Then she saw all of the colored people standing up in the back of the courtroom. Packed tight like a case of celery, only much darker than that. They were all against her, she could see. (185)

“Gentlemen of the jury, it is for you to decide whether the defendant has committed a cold blooded murder or whether she is a poor broken creature, a devoted wife trapped by unfortunate circumstances who really in firing a rifle bullet into the heart of her late husband did a great act of mercy.” (188)

## reader's position (2)

The creation of a discourse of “the folk” as a *rural* people in Hurston’s work in the 1920s and 1930s displaces the migration of black people to cities. (Carby, 76)

Her representation of Eatonville...is both an attempt to make the unknown known and a nostalgic attempt to preserve a disappearing folk culture. (80)

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The assertion of autonomy implicit in this figuration of a discourse that exists only for the pleasure of the self [at the end of *Their Eyes*] displaces the folk as community utterly and irrevocably. (87)

## reader's position (3)

“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)

1. Think chronologically and describe **change**
2. Think structurally and describe **the space of possibilities**

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|      |                                                                                 |
|------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1896 | James, "The Figure in the Carpet," in <i>Embarrassments</i> (London: Heinemann) |
| 1916 | Joyce, <i>A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man</i> (New York: Huebsch)       |
| 1917 | "Padmini," "Vasantica," <i>Indian Ladies' Magazine</i>                          |
| 1926 | Rosehill, "When Is a Woman 'Too Old'?" <i>Love Story Magazine</i>               |
| 1927 | Woolf, <i>To the Lighthouse</i> (London: Hogarth)                               |
| 1929 | Larsen, <i>Passing</i> (New York: Knopf)                                        |
| 1930 | Faulkner, <i>As I Lay Dying</i> (New York: Cape & Smith)                        |
|      | Narayan, "A Night of Cyclone," <i>The Hindu</i> (Madras)                        |
| 1931 | Schalk, "Love in a Penthouse," <i>Love Story Magazine</i>                       |
| 1935 | Anand, <i>Untouchable</i> (London: Wishart)                                     |
| 1936 | Barnes, <i>Nightwood</i> (London: Faber)                                        |
| 1937 | Heyer, "Lady, Your Pardon," <i>Australian Women's Weekly</i>                    |
|      | Hurston, <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i> (Philadelphia: Lippincott)         |

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## story I: literary modernism

- ▶ James: ambiguity and the pleasure of technique
- ▶ Joyce: significant form, consciousness, irony
- ▶ Woolf: multiple consciousness, Time Passes
- ▶ Larsen: ironizing melodrama
- ▶ Faulkner: on beyond realism
- ▶ Anand: consciousness and politics
- ▶ Barnes: anti-mimesis
- ▶ Hurston: folk modernism?

## story 2: literary modernity

- ▶ James, Joyce, Woolf, Faulkner, Barnes: the art novel
- ▶ Rosehill, Schalk, Heyer: pulp genre specialization
- ▶ Sathianadhan, Narayan, Anand: literarizing Indian English
- ▶ Larsen, Hurston: Renaissance women and the challenge to racial convention
- ▶ Faulkner, Anand, Hurston: the voice of the people

next

▶ read on