

# Twentieth-Century Fiction I

November 18. Anand, concluded. Hurston (I).

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# review

## language

the prestige and power of English

the danger of metropolitan condescension

“Indianizing” English (appropriation/defamiliarization)

cultural and political nationalism

the rise of Indian English fiction

but still: an elite idiom (Bashir’s, not Bakha’s)

## caste

ritual hierarchy of purity

imperialism: rigidification *and* loosening

# proletarian fiction

Anand in the “Thirties movement” / proletarian literature  
global in scope  
spurred by Popular Front  
(loosening of CP line in favor of anti-fascist alliance)  
Anand important in Progressive Writers’ Association

# proletarian fiction

Several challenges...: the attempt to represent working-class life in a genre that had developed as the quintessential narrator of bourgeois or middle-class manners, kin structures, and social circles; the attempt to represent a collective subject in a form built around the interior life of the individual; the attempt to create a public, agitational work in a form that, unlike drama, depended on private, often domestic consumption.

Michael Denning, "The Novelists' International" (2002)

# proletarian fiction

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# public, agitational

Sad and wistful, she heaved a soft sigh and felt something in her heart asking for mercy. The sun overhead shot down bright arrows of heat, and inspired a feeling of the passing of time...And yet no caste Hindu seemed to be near....

‘Oh, Maharaj! Maharaj! Won’t you draw us some water, please?’

# public, agitational

‘Do you know you have touched me and defiled me, you cockeyed son of a bow-legged scorpion! Now I will have to go and take a bath to purify myself.’ (46)

‘This dirty dog bumped right into me! So unmindfully do these sons of bitches walk in the streets! He was walking along without the slightest effort at announcing his approach, the swine!’ (47)

# public, agitational

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(40–41)

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# public, agitational

Bakha felt thrilled to the very marrow of his bones. That the Mahatma should want to be born as an outcaste! That he should love scavenging!...

‘If there are any Untouchables here,’ he heard the Mahatma say, ‘they should realise that they are cleaning Hindu society.’ (He felt like shouting to say that he, an Untouchable, was there, but he did not know what the Mahatma meant by ‘cleaning Hindu society.’)

# discussion

'In order to emancipate themselves they have to purify themselves'....

He wanted to forget the last passages that he had heard.

(148)

What is the political significance of (a) the Mahatma's demand (b) Bakha's response to it (c) Anand's representation of both?

# debate form

‘I shall only speak about the so-called “Untouchables,” whom the government tried to alienate from Hinduism by giving them a separate legal and political status.’ (146)

These political demands of the Untouchables have been the subject matter of great controversy between the Untouchables and the Hindus. Mr. Gandhi, the friend of the Untouchables, preferred to fast unto death [in the 1932 Pune *satyagraha*] rather than consent to them and although he yielded he is not reconciled to the justice underlying these demands.

B.R.Ambedkar in 1943

# debate form

The Hindu has no will to equality. His inclination and his attitude are opposed to the democratic doctrine of one man one value. Every Hindu is a social Tory and political Radical. Mr Gandhi is no exception to this rule. He presents himself to the world as a liberal but his liberalism is only a very thin veneer which sits very lightly on him as dust does on one's boots. You scratch him and you will find that underneath his liberalism he is a blue blooded Tory. He stands for the cursed caste. He is a fanatic Hindu upholding the Hindu religion.

Ambedkar

# interior life

As the brief Indian twilight came and went, a sudden impulse shot through the transformations of space and time, and gathered all the elements that were dispersed in the stream of his soul into a tentative decision: 'I shall go and tell father all that Gandhi said about us,' he whispered to himself, 'and all that that poet said. Perhaps I can find the poet some day and ask him about his machine.' (157)

# interior life

He stood lost for a moment, confused in the shimmering rays, feeling as though there were nothing but the sun, the sun, everywhere, in him, on him, before him and behind him...As he emerged from the world of that rare, translucent lustre into which he had been lifted, he stumbled over a stone and muttered a curse. (34)

His wealth of unconscious experience, however, was extraordinary. It was a kind of crude sense of the world, in the round, such as the peasant has who can do the job while the laboratory agriculturalist is scratching his head. (94)

# collective subject

A superb specimen of humanity he seemed whenever he made the high resolve to say something, to go and do something, his fine form rising like a tiger at bay. (65)

A murderer might have advanced like that, one confident in his consummate mastery of the art of killing. (58)

# Zora Neale Hurston



1891 b. Alabama  
1919 Howard University  
1924 First publication  
1925 enters Barnard College; studies anthropology under Franz Boas; degree in 1928  
1925 Appears in *New Negro*  
1926 *Fire!!* (w/Hughes and Thurman)  
1927 Folklore research in Florida  
1931 "Hoodoo in America," *J. Am. Folklore*  
1931–32 Theatre and concert work  
1934 *Jonah's Gourd Vine*  
1935 *Mules and Men* (folk stories)  
1937 In Haiti on a Guggenheim  
writes *Their Eyes* (published same year)  
1942 Memoir *Dust Tracks on a Road* a popular success  
1950–60 increasing poverty and obscurity  
1960 d. Florida  
1975 revival

Hurston in 1938, by Carl Van Vechten (Library of Congress)

Droning a drowsy syncopated tune,  
Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon,  
I heard a Negro play.

Down on Lenox Avenue the other night  
By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light

He did a lazy sway. . . .

He did a lazy sway. . . .

To the tune o' those Weary Blues.

With his ebony hands on each ivory key  
He made that poor piano moan with melody.

O Blues!

Swaying to and fro on his rickety stool  
He played that sad raggy tune like a musical  
fool.

Sweet Blues!

Coming from a black man's soul.

O Blues!

In a deep song voice with a melancholy tone  
I heard that Negro sing, that old piano moan—

“Ain't got nobody in all this world,

Ain't got nobody but ma self.

I's gwine to quit ma frownin'

And put ma troubles on the shelf.”

Thump, thump, thump, went his foot on the floor.  
He played a few chords then he sang some more

—

“I got the Weary Blues

And I can't be satisfied.

Got the Weary Blues

And can't be satisfied—

I ain't happy no mo'

And I wish that I had died.”

And far into the night he crooned that tune.

The stars went out and so did the moon.

The singer stopped playing and went to bed

While the Weary Blues echoed through his head.

He slept like a rock or a man that's dead.

Langston Hughes, “The Weary Blues” (1926)

# Harlem Renaissance

We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasures doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves.

Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (1926)

# writing back

to dominant representations

The answer lies in what we may call THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF UNNATURAL HISTORY. This is an intangible built on folk belief. It is assumed that all non-Anglo-Saxons are uncomplicated stereotypes....They are lay figures mounted in the museum where all may take them in at a glance. They are made of bent wires without insides at all. So how could anybody write a book about the non-existent?

Hurston, "What White Publishers Won't Print" (1950)

The American Negro exhibit is a group of two. Both of these mechanical toys are built so that their feet eternally shuffle, and their eyes pop and roll. Shuffling feet and those popping, rolling eyes denote the Negro, and no characterization is genuine without this monotony. One is seated on a stump picking away on his banjo and singing and laughing. The other is a most amoral character before a share-cropper's shack mumbling about injustice. Doing this makes him out to be a Negro "intellectual." It is as simple as all that.

Hurston, "What White Publishers Won't Print" (1950)

# dialect anew

“What she doin coming back here in dem overhalls? Can’t she find no dress to put on?—Where’s dat blue satin dress she left here in?—Where all dat money her husband took and died and left her?—What dat ole forty year ole ‘oman doin’ wid her hair swingin’ down her back lak some young gal?—Where she left dat young lad of a boy she went off here wid?—Thought she was going to marry?—Where he left *her*?—What he done wid all her money?—Betcha he off wid some gal so young she ain’t even got no hairs—why she don’t stay in her class?—” (2)

# dialect anew

“Nanny...got de land and everything and then Mis’ Washburn helped out uh whole heap wid things.”

Pheoby’s hungry listening helped Janie to tell her story....

It was a spring afternoon in West Florida. Janie had spent most of the day under a blossoming pear tree in the backyard.... It stirred her tremendously. How? Why? It was like a flute song forgotten in another existence and remembered again. What? How? Why? This singing she heard that had nothing to do with ears. (10)

# discussion

They sat there in the fresh young darkness close together.

...

Time makes everything old so the kissing, young darkness became a monstropolous old thing while Janie talked. (7)

On this last page of the first chapter, what is the relation between the narrative idiom and the characters' idioms?

## Quick search results

No dictionary entries found for 'monstropolous'.

Check your search and try again.

**Widen search?** Find 'monstropolous' in: » phrases (0) » definitions (0) » etymologies (0) » quotations (0) » full text (0)

**Nearest matches:** the closest dictionary entries to 'monstropolous' alphabetically are—

1. **monstriferous, *adj.***

...Producing or bearing monsters....