

Early Twentieth-Century Fiction  
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Office hours: Monday 2 p.m., or by appointment

April 19, 2021. Hurston, concluded; Tagore (1).

## review: Hurston's social vision of the hurricane

- ▶ historical precision, but not a chronicle
- ▶ “natural” disaster reveals social division
- ▶ segregation is not immutable but coercively enforced

“that was all”

It woke up old Okechobee and the monster began to roll in his bed. Began to roll and complain like a peevish world on a grumble. The folks in the quarters and the people in the big houses further around the shore heard the big lake and wondered. The people felt uncomfortable but safe because there were the seawalls to chain the senseless monster in his bed. The folks let the people do the thinking. (158)

White people had preempted that point of elevation and there was no more room. They could climb up one of its high sides and down the other, that was all. Miles further on, still no rest. (164)

## 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.

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)

## 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)

## reader's position (2)

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.

## the universal aunt

“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)

## the forgotten dead (again)

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)

# 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

## 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)

## parallel histories

1891 Tagore, “poṣṭmāṣṭār”

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*

1923 Toomer, *Cane*

1923 Sayers, *Whose Body?*

1925 Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

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*

whose side?

Ratan ceased to be a little girl. She at once stepped into the post of mother. (164–65)

The master said: “You need not be anxious about my going away, Ratan; I shall tell my successor to look after you.” These words were kindly meant, no doubt: but inscrutable are the ways of a woman’s heart!... She burst out weeping. (167; qtd. by [noadeo](#) and [RH](#)).

## the universal, particular versions

- ▶ Consider the four translations of the ending of “The Postmaster” on the handout. Locate a detail in the Mitter, Radice, or Chaudhuri version that is distinctive.

what literature is Tagore part of?

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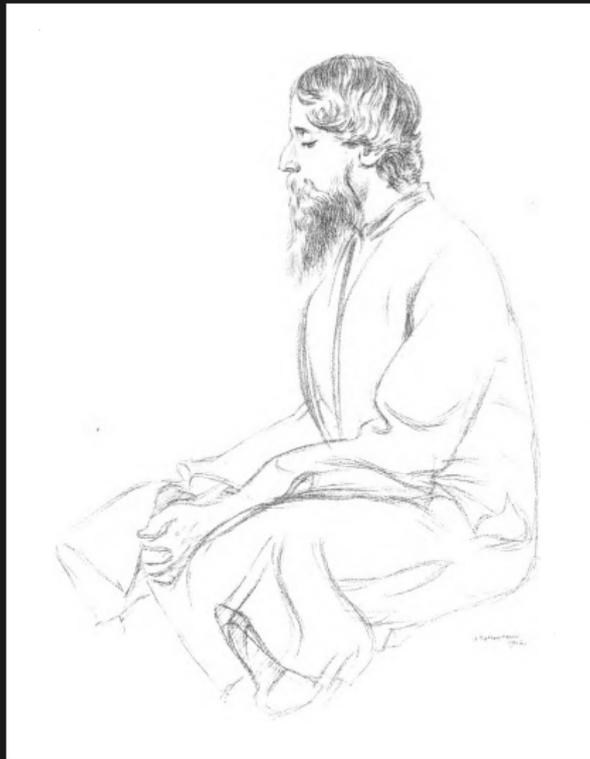
It was not at all necessary for my own reputation that I should find my place in the history of your literature. It was an accident for which you were also responsible and possibly most of all was Yeats. But yet sometimes I feel almost ashamed that I whose undoubted claim has been recognized by my countrymen 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](#).

## modernity (I)

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)

## modernity (2)

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)

## modernity (3)

Such little incidents would drive out greater events from her mind.  
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Let us not take it for granted that life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small. (Woolf, “Modern Fiction,” 150)

## Tagore: bare outlines

1861 b. Calcutta

1878 1st visits England (briefly at UCL)

1880 *Evening Songs* (Bengali debut volume)

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](#))

## globalizing literary English: empire

I have never found one among them [Orientalists] who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.... We have to educate a people who cannot at present be educated by means of their mother tongue. We must teach them some foreign language. The claims of our own language it is hardly necessary to recapitulate. It stands pre-eminent even among the languages of the West.

We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country.

Thomas Babington Macaulay, minute of the Committee of Public Instruction, Calcutta, February 2, 1835, in G. O. Trevelyan, *The Competition Wallah* (London, Macmillan, 1866; [HathiTrust](#)), 322, 329.

## within and beyond English: Bengal Renaissance

- 1828 Brahma Samaj founded (Ram Mohan Roy, Tagore's grandfather)
- 1861 Michael Madhusudan Dutt, *Meghnādavadha kāvya* (Bengali epic)
- 1864 Bankimchandra Chatterjee, *Rajmohan's Wife* (English novel)
- 1880 Tagore, *Evening Songs* (Bengali debut volume)
- 1905 Rokeya Sekhawat Hussein, "Sultana's Dream" (English story)
- 1929 Bibhutibhushan Banerjee, *Pather Panchali* (Bengali novel)

If a Western literature should turn to this extraordinary literature in Bengali [the Bengal Renaissance] and expect to find some sort of simple response to colonialism, he or she will be disappointed; the response is complex, subtle, varied and profound; the colonial world is represented, in these fictions, as history, contemporaneity, memory and change, by, for instance, the post office and the railways, by the names of roads, by professions, and old and new ways of life, rather than the figure of the British oppressor. This peripherality of the Western figure might be unsettling to the Western reader.

Amit Chaudhuri, "Modernity and the Vernacular," in *The Vintage Book of Modern Indian Literature* (New York: Vintage, 2004), xix–xx.

## “world literature”

It is my express wish that in awarding the prizes no consideration whatever shall be given to the nationality of the candidates, but that the most worthy shall receive the prize, whether he be a Scandinavian or not.

Alfred Nobel's will, 1895. [nobelprize.org](http://nobelprize.org).

Concerning our understanding of this poetry [*Gitanjali*, etc.], by no means exotic but truly universally human in character, the future will probably add to what we know now. We do know, however, that the poet's motivation extends to the effort of reconciling two spheres of civilization widely separated, which above all is the characteristic mark of our present epoch and constitutes its most important task and problem.

Harald Hjärne, Award Ceremony Speech, December 10, 1913. [nobel-prize.org](http://nobel-prize.org).

## Tagore's "universal literature"

To see literature through the mirror of nation, time and people is to diminish it, not see it fully. If we understand that in literature the universal man (*vishva-manav*) expresses himself, then we can perceive what is truly worthy of observing in literature.

World literature [*viśva-sāhitya*] is not merely the sum of your writings, plus my writing, plus his writings. We generally see literature in this limited, provincial manner. To free oneself of that regional narrowness and resolve to see the universal being in world literature, to apprehend such totality in every writer's work, and to see its interconnectedness with every man's attempt at self-expression—that is the objective we need to pledge ourselves to.

Tagore, "Visva Sahitya" (1907), trans. Rijula Das and Makarand R. Paranjape, in *Rabindranath Tagore in the 21st Century*, ed. Debashish Banerji (New Delhi: Springer India, 2015), 286, 288.

next

- ▶ “The Hungry Stones”
  - ▶ Read and print out Basu version (Sakai)
  - ▶ Recommended: read Ghosh version (Sakai)