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Zora Neale Hurston

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The first novel by the noted black novelist, folklorist, and anthropologist. Originally published in 1934, it was praised by Carl Sandburg as "a bold and beautiful book, many a page priceless and unforgettable."

Jonah's Gourd Vine Details

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From Reader Review Jonah's Gourd Vine for online ebook

Jessica says

Set in the Redemption South, Jonah's Gourd Vine follows John Pearson from youth through his late life. While John is at the center of the novel, Hurston is committed to telling the stories of the women that surround him. Indeed, it is the women who emerge as the books' stars. Captured in Jonah's Gourd Vine is the dynamism of black life in the rural south. Sharecropping as well as racism and poverty are facts of life for many of Hurston's characters but it never defines them. This is much like her treatment of language. Written in southern vernacular, Hurston's respect for rural black culture is apparent in her careful use of the language. Never condescending, the use of vernacular adds an additional layer of depth and beauty to her writing. She also manages to weave in her own anthropological work into the songs, speeches and taunts of her characters. Less popular than *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Jonah is filled with as many striking images as her later seminal work. Much like *Their Eyes*, Jonah's Gourd Vine explores the complicated relationship between black men and women as well as a host of other themes. A thought provoking and undoubtedly impressive text.

Darryl says

Hurston's first novel, published in 1934, is a fictionalized account of the lives of her parents set in the post-Reconstruction South to the years that followed the First World War. The title refers to the Biblical prophet, who cared more about the death of the gourd vine that sheltered him from the sun than the people of the nearby town of Nineveh, who were at risk of annihilation at the hand of God.

John Crittenden is born out of wedlock in post-Reconstruction Alabama to Amy, who later marries Ned, a sharecropper and embittered former slave who constantly butts heads with the strapping "high yaller" boy who isn't his own. Weary of the abuse and threats of his stepfather, John travels to a nearby farm to work, and meets Lucy, a younger girl who he falls in love with and ultimately marries. However, John is a strong and handsome man who is desired by many women, and he takes full advantage of this, to the detriment of his wives and young children. The aftermath of one affair nearly lands him on a chain gang, and he escapes to Florida, where he eventually moves to Eatonville, one of the first all-black towns in the Deep South. After working as a carpenter and sending for his family he eventually becomes a gifted preacher, who is in high demand in neighboring towns. However, he has not lost his taste for the flesh despite his love of the Spirit, and the problems that caused him to flee Alabama come to haunt him and his family in Florida.

I enjoyed this debut effort by Hurston, with its rich characters and compelling story, and it was nearly as good as her second and more famous novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

Morgan says

"God was grumbling his thunder and playing the zig-zag lightning thru his fingers."

That's how Zora's first novel opens up. Pretty catchy if you ask me. Her writing in this book is solid I think. I'm still convinced she has a separate voice from other authors. You can tell this is a first novel though. I

thought the first couple of chapters were slow, but they pick up later. You can also tell this book is about her parents, well a fictitious version of them.

I wouldn't recommend this to first time readers of Zora though. Go with her popular novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* or go with her non-fiction. I'm still on a mission to read ALL her books.

DeMisty D. says

Hurston is a wonderful writer, but I wonder if her talents were more geared towards anthropology than fiction writing. In *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and in other works I have read by her, events happen with a quick sentence, time passes without a mention, and the reader is forced to fill in the blanks.

Still, her gift of dialog is superb. I can hear these people talking to each other and through their voices, I can see them clearly. She makes clear the lesser of any evil—working for one white sharecropper or farmer over another, and she makes her reader want autonomy as much as her characters. Even if I was not poor and black, I could understand the need to be in a city where you can be part of the legislative process!

Again, still, I want her to make clearer segues in both time and events.

Kiana says

While I absolutely ADORED *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, this book left me dissatisfied. The biggest reason would probably be the writing - I could tell that it was Hurston's first novel. The story moved at a very fast pace, which isn't necessarily a bad thing as a whole, but in this case, I would have liked her to slow it down. At times, it felt really choppy (for lack of a better word) and there was too much change in location/situation that it was hard to keep up with John's feelings. As the protagonist, and because this was his coming-of-age novel, I would have liked to feel more connected to him than I did. What I really appreciated Hurston for, though, was addressing issues of gender-identity, marriage, and sex-drive at a time in history when these topics were not traditionally up for discussion. Moreover, she addressed these issues through the eyes of a man, making her agenda even more subtle and crafty than it was in *TEEWG*.

Cindy Marsch says

This is an astonishing book, full of richness and sorrow and grace, as life is. I need to read more Hurston, particularly her autobiography--I appreciated Henry Louis Gates's Afterword here. I grew up in Florida and rode the train through Sanford--the setting of much of this book--a number of times a few decades after this was written, and I recognized from my memory glimpses of how the world there used to be. Hurston has a distinctive narrative style that passes years sometimes with just the change of a paragraph--and I haven't decided whether that's a flaw or a feature, but in the end I think the book must just be what it is, and we are privileged to experience it.

Tiffany says

This book gives a vivid picture of the stereotypes and folklore that exist in the Southern states. Often times I found myself chuckling at the myths and stories created within the community.

Zora is a wonderful writer who knows the thoughts of the Southern people.

Jean says

Wonderfull story. The story of the life of John and Lucy Pearson and their community in the 1930 south.

I fell in love with Lucy the moment I met her. Although she is too laid-back in accepting the action of her gad-about husband, she is smart deep thinking woman who lovesher husband more than she does herself.

ohn says that he loves Lucy but he runs from life's adversities

leaving Lucy to cope alone.She copes throughout their life together rarely complaining. Lucy is the glue that holds this family together.

I disliked John from the moment that he met Lucy. He leans on her and needs

her to survive emotionally but for the most part, he refuses to admit this.

although there is something with his relationships with men that reveals some likeable traits despite his roving, philandering, woman hungry ways. I even enjoyed deciphering the dialect.

booklady says

This is Hurston's first novel and it is amazing. A young man, John Buddy Pearson, a 'yallar' man as he is often called because of his white parentage, is big, strong, handsome, and charismatic, gifts which are an advantage and a disadvantage at the same time.

This story traces John's life from his teenage years on. It begins in the Reconstruction era when things have changed, and they haven't at the the same time. Then there are some things about the human heart which never change and are colorblind. John is his mother's favorite, but rejected by her husband, the man who raised him, as a bastard. It is only the first of many situations where John is loved and hated simultaneously, sometimes for his own doings, sometimes for circumstances beyond his control. It continues to follow John through his marriage to the unforgettable Lucy of the irresistible eyes which made me think of St. Lucy, who was also known for her eyes.

I believe the title refers to the seeming arbitrariness of things, such as the vine which grew up to shelter Jonah, which he came to love, and then lost when it was cut down:

'But God said to Jonah, "Do you have a right to be angry over the gourd plant?" Jonah answered, "I have a right to be angry—angry enough to die." Then the LORD said, "You are concerned over the gourd plant which cost you no effort and which you did not grow; it came up in one night and in one night it perished. And should I not be concerned over the great city

of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot know their right hand from their left, not to mention all the animals?"

The dialect takes some getting used to, but there is this incredible Glossary at the end which translates some of the best colloquialisms. I was reading them to my daughter last night on the phone. Some you might guess at, but others, she agreed with me, you would never know without this aide. This would be one book to hear in audio if you get the chance. A real treat of a book.

Bonnie says

Just wonderful book. Zora Neale Hurston was a masterful storyteller. Her work shines.

tortoise dreams says

The first novel by the author of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the story of a young man growing up to adulthood, but never fully reconciling himself.

Book Review: *Jonah's Gourd Vine* is just as good as *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, but is a smaller more focused story. While reading this wonderful novel, I felt as if I was sitting on the front steps, listening to the wisest woman on the block weave her stories of people she'd known long ago, staying up till late at night because I never wanted the words to end. As with Zadie Smith's writing, the characters come alive and the reader becomes fully invested, as if the people we meet are relatives or next door neighbors. In this book from 1934, Hurston says more about feminism, race in America, women and men, class, and poverty than any book written this year. She writes without self-pity and without defeat. Black people in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* are not less, incomplete, victimized, or somehow deprived versions of whites. They are whole, strong, determined, living full lives and confronting the world as they find it. Hurston is fully aware and writes of their reality, but for her white people are just another fact of life, like the weather, nature, fortune and misfortune. She has no time for hating or railing against the inequality she recognizes. Her characters are strong, intelligent, self-contained, they persevere, determined to carve their lives out of the wilderness. They are just as happy and realized as others; perhaps more so. This is a beautifully written book, poetry oozing between the words, lucky I get to see that world through other people's eyes. I'd never have known this was a first novel, it was so complete and rewarding. Only occasionally did I have the feeling that Hurston's field studies were being quoted at too great a length, but at the same time I enjoyed the idea of getting to see the results of her sociological and anthropological research. But don't forget that this is literature, with a fascinating readable surface, but with many thoughts and messages underneath. Readers could endlessly discuss what forces drive Lucy and John (the names of Hurston's parents), the role of religion, the strength and sorority of the women, the reality of hoodoo in the book, relations between classes and races. *Jonah's Gourd Vine* is as deep as the reader is willing to go (the Foreword by Rita Dove and Afterword by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. are both well worth reading after you've read the novel -- you'll find they encapsulate many of your own ideas). The book was also a call to action for me: I want to (1) learn more about Zora Neale Hurston's biography (she was forgotten for decades until Alice Walker published an article about her in 1975); (2) read her other two novels; (3) find more of her short stories (I read "Sweat," it was brilliant). This little review only scratches the surface. For me Hurston is now a must read. [4★]

Harajyuku says

An okay novel but a great attempt by Hurston to freeze and depict some of the attitudes, acts, language, and feelings of early 20th century Southern black Americans. You can perceive her personal interest in feminism, anthropology, and voodoo very clearly. There were some stunning turns of phrase, like: "The old black woman of the sky chased the red-eyed sun across the sky every evening and smothered him in her cloak at last. This had happened many times."

Akeisha says

This was the first Zora Neale Hurston book I have ever read, and it rocks like a Barack Obama speech.

It may take some getting used to reading the Black vernacular, but once the rhythm is there the book flies.

I LOVE this book!

Frank says

Funny, wise, moving easily between the casual, the lyrical, and the profound, this novel presents a vivid panorama of African American life in the South from around 1885 to 1930 or so, as it follows the life of John Pearson, a child of former slaves, a preacher, an inveterate lover of women.

Kate says

Reading Zora Neale Hurston is like settling back into a comfortable armchair and listening to stories told by a favorite relative who happens to be a keen observer, an insightful student of human nature in all its frailties and aspirations, and an excellent mimic. I felt totally immersed in this book, as in "Their Eyes Were Watching God" and Hurston's stories, though I didn't find it as finished as the other works. The element of folklore in John's story added an almost Biblical resonance to what's essentially a simple tale of a gifted and flawed man.
