
Modern Memoir and Esoteric Aesthetics: The Inauthentic Context of Zora Neale Hurston's "Ring of Thieves"

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Abstract: Cecily Swanson argues that “modernism’s Gurdjieff craze in fact played a surprising role in the development of an overlooked canon of popular autobiographies: Muriel Draper’s memoir, *Music at Midnight*; Margaret Anderson’s memoir, *My Thirty Years’ War*; and Kathryn Hulme’s autobiographical novel, *We Lived As Children*.” Swanson reads Draper, Anderson, and Hulme because they wrote as esotericists, while she divorces the memoirs from any overt esoteric influences, contents, or aesthetics. There is no need to search further for the source of the mode of the popular autobiographies by Anderson and Draper than what of Loos’s novel comes through the Peggy Hopkins Joyce/Zora Neale Hurston memoir. *Marriage, Men, and Me* appears near the commencement of a line of esoteric memoirs that becomes visible in the best-selling works by Draper and Anderson but then continues expansively.

Keywords: Modern memoir, modernist esoteric aesthetics, Fulcanelli, Behaviorism, stylometric analysis, Gurdjieff, A. R. Orage, Zora Neale Hurston

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In “The Language of Behavior: Gurdjieff and the Emergence of Modernist Autobiography,” Cecily Swanson argues that “modernism’s Gurdjieff craze in fact played a surprising role in the development of an overlooked canon of popular autobiographies: Muriel Draper’s memoir, *Music at Midnight*; Margaret Anderson’s memoir, *My Thirty Years’ War*; and Kathryn Hulme’s autobiographical novel, *We Lived As Children*” (696). Swanson’s high-handed and derogatory exposition of G. I. Gurdjieff’s esoteric school is in line with Roger Lipsey’s observation about the tendency of academic accounts of Gurdjieff to take the form of character assassination:

What he writes of Gurdjieff himself is caricature based on a decades-old tradition of

caricature passed from author to author, reviewer to reviewer, without a glance at Gurdjieff himself. Misrepresentations of this kind became something of a parlor sport, a free zone where critics could outdo one another's scorn and condescension without fear of correction. Who was on duty, so to speak, to make the correction? The Gurdjieff teaching had long since largely abandoned public space and debate; it had its own concerns. Yet questions remain: Why is the reception of Gurdjieff and his teaching, particularly among some intellectuals—and in this instance one of earned fame—so lastingly sour? (Lipsey 5).

In Swanson's treatment of the three popular autobiographies under discussion, she is at great pains to attribute the method behind them to the affiliation of Gurdjieff's teachings with John B. Watson's behaviorist psychology. While associating the Gurdjieff-influenced memoirs with Behaviorism, Swanson entirely looks past the aesthetic of "objective" literature that Gurdjieff and his deputy in America, A. R. Orage, installed in the vast school of modern writing that consisted of those of their followers who pursued literary careers. Literary criticism concerned with the writing of "objective" literature is a matter of crucial importance because if Gurdjieffian and Oragean literary works were merely the impersonal productions that Swanson describes, they would never have been written at all: as described by Swanson the memoirs violate the esoteric conception of literature in several ways. In other words, Swanson reads Draper, Anderson, and Hulme because they wrote as esotericists, while she divorces the memoirs from any overt esoteric influences, contents, or aesthetics. Swanson's interpretation is further skewed by her insistence that the modern autobiographies that have drawn her attention can be understood outside of the esoteric context in which they were authored. While superficially there was an agreement between the Gurdjieff Work and Behaviorism that man is so-to-speak a machine, Behaviorism held that man is nothing more than a machine, while the Work specified that in addition to the limitations of waking consciousness man is capable of other states of awareness including cosmic consciousness. In the Work not only is there an inner world, this "essence" is set in opposition to the personality, so that a normal man lives an inharmonious life. It was the claim of the teachers of the Work that these psychological contradictions could be overcome once the individual had reached the state of a unified identity, or "I." William Page states that

The way of dividing man into three parts, personality, essence, and consciousness is from the Gurdjieff/Ouspensky system. In reality personality and consciousness can be further divided. Personality can be divided into false and true personality and consciousness can be divided into higher emotional center and higher intellectual center. These five levels can be seen as separate inner worlds. False personality is the heaviest and under the most laws, higher centers are the lightest and under the fewest laws, and essence is in between.

Personality is not a function, and therefore easily distinguished from mind. Personality is a collection of opinions, instinctive habits, education, negative emotions, and habitual postures and movements. It is in a sense all our programming. It is what we were taught to think and

feel, not what we would necessarily think and feel if essence had been left to develop without the intrusions of personality. Essence is what we were born with, our talents, our limitations, and our natural preferences and aversions. Nothing in personality is hardwired; everything in essence is hardwired. In a perfect world preferences in personality would reflect preferences in essence. But our world is far from perfect.

It was by disagreeing on the fundamental nature of consciousness that Watson declared the *Work* to be nonsense and withdrew from association with the Gurdjieffians. When Swanson asserts that Draper, Anderson, and Hulme are surprisingly silent about the inner lives of their writers, she demonstrates that she has misjudged the relationship between the inner and outer lives of those who pursue the goals of Gurdjieff's Fourth Way, the method of the sly man.

Swanson frames the development of esoteric memoir in this way:

What is not yet well understood is how the Gurdjieffian writing exercises inspired a distinct mode of modernist autobiography: one that rejected introspection in favor of the subject's careful study of her social environment. I situate Gurdjieffianism in relationship to the behaviorist psychology of John B. Watson, whose ideas Orage taught to Gurdjieffian novitiates, and whom Gurdjieff met in 1931. Like Watson in his lectures on Behaviorism (1925), both Gurdjieff and Orage taught their students to ignore the hidden depths of human psychology, focusing instead on observable habits and especially attending to oral conversation as factual bases for reporting about bodily mechanisms and social conditions. But unlike Watson, who discouraged self-scrutiny—arguing that only other people's behaviors could be examined—Gurdjieff believed one's own speech and gestures could be studied objectively. So, whereas Watson decried autobiography as an unreliable genre, Gurdjieff and Orage promoted it, asking their students to take note of their own verbal habits and characteristic mannerisms. After writing down every detail of their daily lives, disciples would then read their work aloud to each other, testing the believability of its voice. To further develop his students' confidence in impartial self-documentation, Gurdjieff told them to imagine authorship through metaphors borrowed from new recording technologies: Hulme credited Gurdjieff for helping her develop the "accuracy of a tape recorder"; Anderson saw herself as projected on "a film-screen." These exercises had a strong effect on Draper, Hulme, and Anderson's understandings of their memoirs as offering exact playback of their experiences—"total-recall," Hulme would later describe Anderson's work. And indeed, readers of Draper, Anderson, and Hulme particularly admired how they seemed to capture conversational speech and natural tones of voice. In the words of an early reviewer of Draper and Anderson, their autobiographies were groundbreaking, offering the "singularly important" indication of what "good talk may . . . do to the body of prose within the lifetime of us all." (696-697)

There was nothing casual about the handling of literature in the Gurdjieff-Orage orbit. Jean

Toomer relates that when he reached Gurdjieff's Institute outside of Paris in 1924, he was summarily forbidden to do any sort of writing. Gurdjieff rejected the conditioning imposed by what he called "bon ton" literary language, so modern writing was out of bounds. Another of Gurdjieff's determinations often met with was what he called "word prostitution." As man is asleep according to Gurdjieff, his use of language is mechanical and unconscious. In the deranged state habituated by man, language is only used to manipulate, thus language is misused. Swanson's question about the connection of the writing exercises to modernist autobiography arises out of a mistaken running together of developmental exercises with creative writing. Swanson also overlooks the fact that the nature of the Gurdjieff Work varied in its teaching methods both over time and between the European and American schools. The Work changed radically once Gurdjieff himself became a writer. An important foundational building block of the Gurdjieff Work was "self-observation without identification." Students were trained to become awake to themselves by observing their physical and emotional reactions without attempting to change their behavior. This exercise was but a stage that is a series of progressive exercises that were designed to bring the student to a point of permanent self-remembering. It is obvious that if one attempts to come to such an interior, non-judgmental state of awareness that the recording of external phenomena is an entirely different discipline.

While Swanson offers little separation between the literary frameworks of Gurdjieff and Orage, the difference was vast. Not only did Gurdjieff not encourage his followers in the 1920s at the Prieuré to write, but he also had no useful means of disseminating literature. Gurdjieff's own works were privately published and passed from hand to hand. By contrast, Orage operated a literary organization of vast proportions. He himself actively taught large creative writing courses, while also giving individual assistance. Orage, an important literary figure himself, enrolled in his esoteric school editors, publishers, reviewers, and writers of every stripe—literary novelists, writers of pulp and genre fiction, essayists, journalists, advertising copywriters, poets, dramatists, and writers of screenplays. In many cases, Orage was able to arrange for the publication and ultimate success of literary works. There is a good chance that Orage was even able to arrange for the awarding of important literary prizes to his followers. With this in mind, when we look at the three memoirs that Swanson discusses, it is evident that they are not of a piece. The Draper and Anderson memoirs belong to the era of intense Oragean literary activity. In 1931 an unbridgeable gulf opened up between the Oragean Americans and those loyal to Gurdjieff. The Hulme memoir is separated from those of Draper and Anderson by an important span of time and by very different aesthetics. While the Draper and Anderson memoirs, of 1928 and 1930 respectively, adhere to the so-called "objective" mode of texts by the followers of Orage, Hulme's 1938 memoir lacks any of the nearly invisible attributes of Oragean modernist writing.

The upshot of Gurdjieff's aesthetics was his conclusion that only conscious art was truly art. Conscious art was "objective," while "subjective" art was inherently worthless. Gurdjieff wrote *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*, a massive, rebarbative science fiction epic that was said to be "objective." Gurdjieff never revealed enough about his own "objective" text to allow for any sure understanding of what it was or how to read it. Gurdjieff did leave behind suggestive descriptions

and examples of "objective" art, with the implication that his own writings were "objective." However, Gurdjieff did not provide a key to the hidden level of *Beelzebub's Tales*, so interpretations of the master's text are speculative. Given this extreme view of art, it is not to be wondered at that Gurdjieff did not promote literary production among his immediate followers. In the case of Orage, far different conditions prevailed. Orage had been one of the chief architects of the modern movement in literature. Now that he had become an esotericist, he capitalized on his reputation as a man of letters. In New York, Orage was across an ocean from Gurdjieff, and he assembled a quite different literary program than Gurdjieff's. Orage took Nietzsche's superman ideas quite seriously, and he took it upon himself to organize a movement of supermen whose destiny was to intervene and to shape the course of historical events. Literature was to play an important role in this program, so Orage set about creating numerous works of a new type of literature. This new literature was said by the Orageans to be "objective," but the texts were not modeled on *Beelzebub's Tales*. Instead, Oragean writings conformed to the requirements of "objective" literature in name only. "Objective" literature for Gurdjieff was understood to be the product of those possessing cosmic consciousness, but Orage's followers ignored this requirement and substituted a system that allowed them to insert esoteric doctrines into their writings. In truth, the doctrines were concepts that could be found in published accounts of the Work. By this token, the ideas were better described as exoteric ideas as opposed to esoteric ideas, since no initiation was required to obtain them. The motivation behind the production of these pseudo-"objective" writings was that they would transmit esoteric ideas to the people of the present so that they could be recruited; if a reader possessed a "magnetic center," it was possible that the esoteric ideas in the text would attract the reader and lead to the discovery of an esoteric school. It was also thought that should the planet meet with destruction the "objective" writings could transmit esoteric concepts to the people of a future age.

Literary writings by Orage's followers used an ancient phonetic code to conceal an inner content, while also providing the attentive reader with hints to the existence of the hidden material and clues to assist in the reading of the coded sections. The Oragean literary program can be compared to an industrial business in that it produced specific product lines. One assembly line produced historical novels. Another produced detective fiction. Another produced a line of comic novels in the vein of Ronald Firbank and Evelyn Waugh. Another line put out Western novels. Swanson—unaware of this enormous publishing enterprise—discusses three bestselling popular autobiographies. But there were many more autobiographies produced by Orage's followers—most of them financially unsuccessful.

According to Swanson, the autobiographies were expansions of certain techniques of self-observation. Swanson mentions the "rewinding the film" exercise. Each night the practitioner reviewed the events of the day in reverse. Since autobiography does not depend on a daily review and is not written in reverse, it is not clear how the retrospective "rewinding the film" exercise relates to either self-observation or to the writing of an autobiography. Self-observation was done in real time and was not retrospective. Swanson has fastened onto a few aspects of the three Gurdjieff-influenced autobiographies under her gaze while overlooking important aspects

of the entire topic of modernist esoteric aesthetics. What we need to know more than anything is what purpose was being served by the writings of Orage's followers. According to Swanson, the autobiographies were exercises in "observation without identification," a psychological exercise that was part of the training in spiritual development. The separation of Orage's American group from Gurdjieff came about over a disagreement about specifically the practice of self-observation. Gurdjieff saw the practice as a preliminary exercise that had been over-emphasized by Orage. Gurdjieff taught a multi-faceted approach to development that included sacred dance, concentration exercises, and emotional exercises—all dispensed on a case-by-case basis. According to Gurdjieff, Orage's insistence on the centrality of self-observation and the exclusion of other activities had made the American followers "candidates for lunatic asylum" (Blake). In Gurdjieff's teaching of the Work, there is no place for the writing of autobiographies derived from self-observation. The autobiographies of The Rope group that met with Gurdjieff in the 1930s, to which Hulme belonged, are in no way continuous with those by Orage's followers. It should also be noted that writing is not a part of the self-remembering exercise, which was an outgrowth of the self-observation exercise. To state it bluntly, Gurdjieff did not administer to a literary movement, while Orage did engender a literary movement. It was important for Orage to set forth an esoteric aesthetic in clear enough terms so that his followers could produce literature. Many of Orage's followers were prodigiously prolific: Vardis Fisher, Frank Yerby, Raymond Chandler, John Dos Passos, John O'Hara, Chester Himes, Dawn Powell, Laura Z. Hobson, and William Faulkner. Given the astonishing volume of published writing by the Oragean literary movement, we have to credit Orage with having developed an efficacious formula.

As self-observation was practiced as an exercise in the esoteric school, there was no reason to publish anything at all. The exercise would be finished once the practitioner had gained the ability to be simultaneously present and separate from his actions. It is clear that Orage emphasized the need to publish the autobiographies that had been written, but these autobiographies have an indistinct relationship to the various exercises that Orage taught. Swanson's approach to these autobiographies is counterintuitive, for while she is at pains to demonstrate their singularly flat, Behaviorist-derived treatment of reality, she is only examining them because they were written by members of an esoteric school. This proposition suggests that Swanson has not taken account of some important attributes of these esoteric autobiographies.

According to Gurdjieff, the essential attribute of an esoteric text is that it contains a legominism: "This word Legominism," replied Beelzebub, "is given to one of the means existing there of transmitting from generation to generation information about certain events of long-past ages, through just those three-centered beings who are thought worthy to be and who are called initiates" (349). The legominism is usually set down in some form of code and is indicated by a "lawful inexactitude"—some type of intentional mistake. Insofar as Gurdjieff's own writings are concerned, there is no understanding of how his texts conform to this description of esoteric texts. When Orage specified what would serve as the delineation of an esoteric text for his followers, it is clear that he followed what had been set down in Fulcanelli's study of the cabala code of the alchemists:

Fulcanelli's main point, the key to unraveling the larger mystery of alchemy and the cathedrals, lies in an understanding of what he calls the "phonetic law" of the "spoken cabala," or the "Language of the Birds." This punning, multi-lingual word play can be used to reveal unusual and, according to Fulcanelli, meaningful associations between ideas. "What unsuspected marvels we should find, if we knew how to dissect words, to strip them of their barks and liberate the spirit, the divine light, which is within," Fulcanelli writes. He claims that in our day this is the natural language of the outsiders, the outlaws and heretics at the fringes of society.

It was also the "green language" of the Freemasons ("All the Initiates expressed themselves in cant," Fulcanelli reminds us) who built the art gothique of the cathedrals. Ultimately the "art cot," or the "art of light," is derived from the Language of the Birds, which seems to be a sort of Ur-language taught by both Jesus and the ancients. It is also mentioned in the Sufi text, entitled "The Conference of the Birds," by Attar the Chemist. In de Tassey's French translation of this work, which Fulcanelli references, the "conference" of the title is translated as "language." De Tassey goes on to explain the complex linguistic metaphor beneath the simple fable. Fulcanelli uses the same method to decode the alchemical meaning of the cathedrals. (Bridges)

Orage's form of legominism differs greatly from what Gurdjieff specifies, for Gurdjieff expects the reader to use active insight to correct whatever mistakes that have been intentionally presented. Orage merely expects the reader to recognize that the text alludes to an esoteric doctrine. An example of Orage's usage is found early on in the London section of Draper's *Music at Midnight*. Draper describes in detail three disastrous musical performances. Draper carefully sets apart the three inferior performers from the performances of the master musicians who regularly performed at her house, and Draper jokingly states that she would like to give a special concert just for the three calamitous musicians. These three unfortunate events identify a legominism. Further indications of the esoteric nature of these events are given in the form of the exaggerated size of the three musicians. "Mistakes" in proportion are often used as intentional errors in esoteric art. We are also told that in the case of two of the performers they are heavily veiled. In the case of the figure who is not veiled, we are told that he never speaks and never divulges his name. There is little doubt that these are not meant to be understood as realistic portraits of actual musicians who attended Draper's salon.

The first episode involves a "pianist from Munich" who is gargantuan in size, timid, and utters not a word. The selection that he plays is Schubert's *Marche Militaire*. Draper concludes her account by saying, "We fell upon Draper [her husband] for an explanation. He had none. There never will be one" (Draper 81). On the esoteric level, the mystery is easily solved. The pianist from Munich is the Moon. In the Gurdjieff work the Moon has an enormous effect on the Earth. Organic life on Earth is an energy source for the Moon: this is often expressed by the formula that

“man is food for the Moon.” However, there is not enough refined energy sent to the Moon, so the deficit is made up by wars and catastrophes: the Moon feeds on mass death. Draper symbolizes this power relationship when she shows the pianist from Munich refusing all food and drink and playing a military march. Munich is the word Moon rendered in the *cabala* phonetic-syllabic code.

In the second episode, Draper relates what happens when “a certain *Mme. Tel et Tel*” (82) — loosely translated as whatever—arrives to play the harp. The transitional introductory paragraph is studded with clues that the passage is a legominism. The harpist has no name but the repetition of *tel* four times, twice in telephone, suggests that we are to read *tel* (let) as *leg*, a contributing component of legominism. *Let* was a common substitute for *leg* among the Oragean writers using the *cabala*. We can hear the word legominism distributed phonetically in the paragraph that introduces *Mme. Tel et Tel*. As in the first episode, this episode eventuality relates to another of Gurdjieff’s fundamental doctrines.

The harpist becomes wedged half of the way down the stairs and must be rescued by means of an elaborate series of arrangements, which so upset the harpist that she never performs. The harpist’s name—this or that—is the first clue that the episode is not realistic. This entrance is followed by a description of the harpist that is equally improbable: “There, halfway down appeared a harp, a beautiful golden harp. It did not move. Behind its strings, as if from a prison in heaven, an enormous black mass was discernible, and just over one corner of it a frightened white fat face of general feminine contour emerged” (82). This episode is an enactment of one of Gurdjieff’s fundamental doctrines. According to Gurdjieff, the direct influence of the Absolute does not reach man. This is expressed by Draper when she says that the harpist is blocked half of the way down the staircase by a beautiful golden harp “as if from a prison in heaven” (82). Draper’s husband must make “a number of strategic moves of harp and lady” in order to free the harpist, so that she can descend the staircase (83). These adjustments comprise the mechanical connection with the Absolute. The passage illustrates the further development of Gurdjieff’s doctrine:

Existing at a specific level within creation we are subject to certain laws---but we have possibilities of ascending or descending within the Cosmic scale. This idea is illustrated in the Biblical story of Jacob’s Ladder. This [W]ork says that to ascend in the cosmic scale we must go against the mechanical downward flow of creation from the Absolute. (“Our Place”)

The third musical catastrophe illustrates yet another doctrine from the Gurdjieff Work. A singer arrives who is once again marked by obvious eccentricities. The woman is a “thrilling Russian-Irish mystic” and “a stark, gaunt, thin, big-boned female, more Irish than Russian and more heavily veiled than mystic” (Draper 84). The woman sings a song about not being angry as though she were in a rage. At the climax, she knocks an entire collection of Canton enamel to the floor. What is of crucial importance is that Draper states that “The whole structure of the song and its meaning were entirely lost, completely contradicted” (85). We can see that Draper uses “**canton** enamel vases, **candlesticks**, boxes and incense **burners**. Well, she **began** to sing, that woman, with

a **fury**" (84; emphasis added) to present the word Kundabuffer—a Gurdjieffian neologism. The Kundabuffer prevents the woman from realizing that her performance has reversed the meaning of the song, "Ich grolle nicht":

Fearing that if the Earthmen found out what their function was, they might find no reason for continuing to live, the higher powers implanted an organ in them called Kundabuffer which prevented them from perceiving their true condition. Later the organ was removed, but unfortunately its consequences remained and they remain to this day. The Kundabuffer was only intended to prevent man from seeing reality, but it also caused the additional qualities of self-love, vanity, swagger, pride, etc. These qualities are psychological and emotional props which put a cloud over the true nature of man. (Owens and Smith)

The three episodes are not accounted for by Swanson. These episodes are set within a narrative that is already headlong and comic, so they are not radically different from the other episodes of the memoir. But when read without an esoteric context they are inexplicable.

Anderson's memoir *My Thirty Years War* is similarly infused with the elements that Orage's aesthetic prescribed. Anderson's method for arranging the esoteric material in her memoir was far more disruptive of reality than Draper's. Where Draper isolated the doctrines in separate episodes, Anderson inserted the material into the narrative by using disguise, absurdity, and symbolism to give the reader access to her inventions. Easily the most outrageous subversion of the narrative level of the memoir is the meeting of the opera singer Marguerite D'Alvarez and the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven. Throughout this episode there are clues that give away the true identities of the two women. For instance, D'Alvarez is said to have arrived "unheralded," an allusion to Gurdjieff's first book, *Beelzebub's Tales*, which was concerned with angelic beings. (*Beelzebub's Tales* was read aloud in meetings starting in 1925, though the volume was not published until much later.) To make it clear that D'Alvarez is Gurdjieff, Anderson dresses her in a "black dress, with black handkerchief" (193), a common device in Oragean literary works, since "kerchief" is one of the only words in English that renders Gurdjieff's name phonetically. D'Alvarez's statement that "my art is for humanity" is yet another allusion to Gurdjieff, whose project was directed toward the unfortunate state of humanity: "Humanity is at a standstill and from a standstill there is a straight path to downfall and degeneration" (Ouspensky 314). Thus D'Alvarez is meant to represent Gurdjieff. The Baroness carries a peacock fan, and since peacock feathers are said to be marked with eyes, the fan is Anderson's way of indicating that the Baroness is Orage, the supreme teacher of spiritual development who has but one "I." The Baroness is a stand-in for Orage, and Anderson no doubt phonetically extracts Orage's name from the Baroness's full name. The episode is a recapitulation of the split between Gurdjieff and Orage's American school in 1931. Many of the seemingly inexplicable passages in Anderson's memoir may be understood when compared to the ideas from the Gurdjieff Work, which they recapitulate in summary.

The concern of Draper and Anderson for the sort of objective, cinematic reportage mediated

through Behavioral psychology that Swanson argues in favor of simply does not exist in these memoirs. Swanson's advocacy of a disinterest in an inner life is not a feature of the Gurdjieff Work. Gurdjieff frequently mentioned hypnosis, which bears directly on the nature of the subconscious mind. The Work was based on a separation of the inner world from the outer world. Gurdjieff told Jane Heap that "Outward you must do. Man has two worlds. Outside he must ceremony make like others. But inner world is yours—all man has is inner world, his independent place. There you can tell your king is *merde* and be sorry you have such king" (Lipsey 168). This separation was so profound that many of Orage's followers took up poses (Communism, Conservatism, Baha'i) and held fast to them for the entirety of their lives, all the while functioning internally as esotericists.

Though, as Swanson states, they do share a similar "chattiness, informality, and transparency" (696), the style of these modern memoirs originates with no influence from either Watson's Behaviorism or the training phase of the Gurdjieff Work known as self-observation without identification. In following up Langston Hughes's charge that Peggy Hopkins Joyce's memoir *Men, Marriage, and Me* was ghostwritten by Wallace Thurman, Whit Frazier Peterson has uncovered in part the origin of the esoteric modern memoir. Peterson applied stylometric analysis tools to Hopkins's memoir and did not reach a finding that confirmed Thurman's involvement: "One sees that *Men, Marriage, and Me* pairs with Anita Loos['s] *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* as well as with *But Gentlemen Marry Brunettes*, but does not pair with either Thurman or Woon" (231). In a discussion of stylistics, it was observed that "the end product of a stylistic analysis is interpretation, which is, in turn, anchored on the reader-analyst" (Shepherd and Sardinha 69). Peterson's analysis showed novels by Zora Neale Hurston on the same tree as the Loos and Joyce texts. This arrangement points to Hurston as the ghostwriter, a possibility that Peterson justifiably discounted due to external considerations. Given what occupations Hurston was supposed to have been involved with at the time, she would have had no time for ghostwriting the Joyce memoir. However, the Gurdjieff Work was based on the injunction to "outwardly play a role, inwardly not identify" (Lipsey). Where the followers of Gurdjieff took up their outward roles fully, the Orageans embraced a radical form of dissimulation. Hurston had no allegiance to the outside world, and she played fast and loose with her responsibilities. In short, Hurston's academic output was in most cases fraudulent and did not occupy her attention to any considerable extent. Hurston would have had plenty of time to complete the Peggy Hopkins Joyce memoir. This assertion is confirmed by Hurston herself. In her notorious essay, "How It Feels to Be Colored Me," she has recorded a statement in the phonetic code that reveals the true state of affairs: the title says "full of code" (i). The fourteenth paragraph of her essay may be read as follows: "I fleeced Anita Loos for Peggy Hopkins Joyce's diary. [Boule Mich is on the Left Bank, where gold-digging Peggy Hopkins Joyce did not habituate, so this intentional mistake indicates the presence of a coded content.] *Marriage, Men, and Me* was knocked together into an esoteric comic novel. I am in a ring of thieves." As we have seen, Peterson's stylometric finding establishes a strong relationship between Joyce's ghostwritten tell-all of 1930 and Anita Loos's best-selling novel, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. There

is no need to search further for the source of the mode of the popular autobiographies by Anderson and Draper than what of Loos's novel comes through the Peggy Hopkins Joyce/Zora Neale Hurston memoir. *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* is a satirical comic novel presented as a diary. Loos's novel is still solidly appreciated as a comic performance. Constance Rosenblum states that "*Men, Marriage, and Me* was a masterful concoction, self-serving, savvy, and thoroughly fun." While Swanson insists that the modern memoirs were read because they were "chatty, linear, and flat" (714-715), at no point does she indicate that the Draper and Anderson memoirs are highly entertaining comedies—funny and entirely given over to absurdity, exaggeration, mockery, parody, and fantasy.

As if Hurston's confession in her essay were not enough, she also provided a description of her authorship of *Men, Marriage, and Me* within the text of Peggy Hopkins Joyce's memoir. Using the section that purports to describe Peggy Joyce's visit to the Great Salt Lake, Hurston uses the phonetic code to relate that Wallace Thurman was unable to produce the diary (and as an editor at the publishing house) contracted Hurston to perform the task: "So I jumped in where it said 4 feet and I am 5 Ft. 3 inches but my feet would not go down and I kept turning around and around and swallowing water until Mr. Heurtin pulled me out" (21). Fortuitously, the actual name of Peggy Joyce's rescuer, Heurtin, was phonetically close enough to her own name, Hurston, that she could allow it to stand for her. Hurston employed Joyce's inability to spell (A device borrowed from the Loos novel) to disguise a signal that the mistake in "swallowing"/swallowing disclosed an important coded content: here "swallowing" must be carefully dissected so that it provides **s wall**, which in turn may be read as **wall s** or Wallace. The name Thurman comes to light a few paragraphs previously as **There Meign/Main** in another example of an emphatically misspelled word providing a clue to the phonetic code.

None of these esoteric special effects would be surprising had Hurston's literary critics understood her talents for what they actually were. Hurston was a writer who managed everything by means of a synthetic imagination grounded in pastiche, mimicry, and subterfuge. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the novel for which she is most renowned was derived from a Danish novel, *Marie Grubbe* (Jens Peter Jacobsen, 1876), a fact which has been consistently ignored by Hurston's critics. It is assumed that Janie Starks was Hurston, when key episodes were borrowed from Jacobsen's novel. There has been a long critical struggle to make sense of the "magical" (Alain Locke) title of Hurston's singular novel, but the title is senseless: it is a cipher for "hear wise words in code." Its senselessness is a necessary indication that it does not communicate adequately on the exterior level. Sections of the novel were taken over bodily from the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*. Many motifs in the novel were taken from *Ancient Egypt* by Gerald Massey. All of Hurston's titles are similarly coded. Another of her highly-regarded books, *Mules and Men* (mend man's soul), is completely faked. There is nothing at all in the compilation that is derived from first-hand research; a skeptical close reading of *Mules and Men* shows that it is all put together from either invention or sources from other cultures. All of these texts contain an esoteric, coded subtext. The ghostwritten *Men, Marriage, and Me* shares the same esoteric characteristics as the writings that bear Hurston's name.

Marriage, Men, and Me appears near the commencement of a line of esoteric memoirs that becomes visible in the best-selling works by Draper and Anderson but then continues expansively. Hurston wrote her own esoteric memoir, *Dust Tracks on a Road*: her title uses a more complex version of the phonetic code to say “trust code.” In Anna Lillios’s study, *Crossing the Creek: The Literary Friendship of Zora Neale Hurston and Marjorie Kinnan*, Hurston can be seen directly involved with Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings’s efforts to write her esoteric memoir, *Cross Creek*. Other modern esoteric memoirs include John Dos Passos’s travel memoir, *Orient Express*, Carl Van Vechten’s *Sacred and Profane Memories*, James Agee’s *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, Dawn Powell’s *My Home Is Far Away*, Van Wyck Brooks’s *Van Wyck Brooks: An Autobiography*, Chester Himes’s *My Life of Absurdity*, Thomas Wolfe’s *The Autobiography of an American Novelist*, Lincoln Kirstein’s *Mosaic: Memoirs*, and Dorothy West’s *The Richer, The Poorer*. The surface texts of these memoirs constantly undermine the reality of the events that they purport to narrate. They require skeptical readings with attention to their many unexpected presentations.

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