

The Sanctified Church

Zora Neale Hurston

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She may have died broke and virtually unknown in 1960, but the marker that Alice Walker had erected on Hurston's grave rightly declares her "Genius of the South." These two anthologies, a small portion of Hurston's writings over a lifetime, show us why that title fits so well. Her essays in *The Sanctified Church* share the African-American folklore, legend, popular mythology, and the unique spirituality of the Southern Black Christian Church, revealing these beliefs through such figures as Mother Catherine, matriarchal founder of a voodoo Christian sect; Uncle Monday, conjure doctor wrapped in superstition and mystery; Daddy Mention, prison escape artist; and High John de Conquer, spirit trickster of freedom and laughter still honored in parts of black America today.

Spunk, on the other hand, deals with the day-to-day lives of those in the rural black South as well as Harlem during the Harlem Renaissance. From resourceful women to vengeful lovers to con men trying to con even themselves into a better existence, Hurston describes this wide spectrum of experiences with a brashness and boldness that is breathtaking in its candor. These two collections, written in large part with the black vernacular, treat one and all to the down-home and the mythical, the triumphant and the bittersweet of past decades that deserve a long overdue place among American classic literature.

NELLY HEITMAN (July / August 1998)

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