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## Chapter Ten

# Zora Neale Hurston's *Moses, Man of the Mountain* and Biblical Studies

Deirdre Dempsey

I first encountered Zora Neale Hurston's novel *Moses, Man of the Mountain* when Shawn Copeland and I developed and co-taught a course called "The Bible and the Black Religious Experience." Shawn and I were colleagues in the Department of Theology at Marquette University; she was in the Systematics Area, I was in the Judaism and Christianity in Antiquity Area. "The Bible and the Black Religious Experience" was the first course I ever co-taught; I learned a great deal from Shawn, in terms of both scholarship and pedagogy. I admire Shawn for her scholarly achievements, her thoughtful pedagogy, and her personal integrity—I am delighted and honored to be able to contribute a piece to this *Festschrift*, a small token of my esteem for Shawn, who has been both a friend and a mentor to me for more than two decades.

Hurston's *Moses, Man of the Mountain* fascinated me from my first reading of the novel. Hurston's narrative followed the basic contours of the biblical story of Moses and the Exodus, but at certain points details were added to the story that were decidedly absent from the biblical text. Some of these details struck me as oddly familiar. In my graduate education, during the 1980s in the Catholic University of America's Department of Semitic and Egyptian Languages and Literatures, historical-critical methodologies for the study of the biblical texts dominated; as I read and re-read *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, I was struck by aspects of Hurston's novel that reminded me of some of the historical-critical theories that had appeared in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, theories I had first encountered in graduate school. Many of these theories would be considered naïve and outdated in modern biblical studies; in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,

however, they epitomized cutting-edge scholarship. This chapter is a presentation of some of the evidence that Zora Neale Hurston was relying on the academic biblical studies current in her time when she wrote her novel, *Moses, Man of the Mountain*. I begin this chapter with a brief consideration of Hurston's career at Barnard College and Columbia University; I then turn to the content and reception of *Moses, Man of the Mountain*. After these preliminaries I point out some elements of *Moses, Man of the Mountain* that seem to overlap with biblical studies of Hurston's time; finally, I touch very briefly on where Hurston might have encountered these ideas.

Hurston, born in Alabama in 1891 and raised in Eatonville, Florida, moved to New York City in 1925. Her literary activity brought her to the attention of the novelist Fannie Hurst and the philanthropist Annie Nathan Meyer; the latter, one of the founders of Barnard College, made it possible for Hurston to attend that college. As one of Hurston's biographers, Robert Hemenway, remarks, "The Barnard experience was critical to Hurston's development, for she came to New York in 1925 as a writer and left Barnard two years later as a serious social scientist, the result of her study of anthropology under Franz Boas."<sup>1</sup> Boas, a German émigré, had established the first anthropology department at a U.S. university at Columbia in 1899; the department was the most influential anthropology department in the country, due in large part to Boas's reputation. Boas, impressed by Hurston's work during her undergraduate years, convinced Hurston to start graduate work in anthropology at Columbia; she enrolled Columbia in the spring of 1935, funded by the Rosenwald Foundation, for a semester of "general ethnology."<sup>2</sup> Under Boas's supervision, sponsored by Columbia University, Hurston returned to the South with a fourteen hundred dollar research fellowship, with the task of collecting African American folklore.

Although Hurston never received a graduate degree in anthropology from Columbia, she did produce two works on folklore, *Mules and Men*, published in 1935, the first collection of African American folklore to be compiled and published by an African American. The book was a popular success; the well-known folklore collector Alan Lomax called it "The most engaging, genuine, and skillfully written book in the field of folklore."<sup>3</sup> Her second book of folklore, *Tell My Horse*, was published in 1938, to more mixed reviews. In the course of her career, Hurston published these two books of folklore, an autobiography called *Dust Tracks on a Road* in 1942, and four novels: *Jonah's Gourd Vine* in 1934; *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, generally regarded as her best novel, in 1937; *Moses, Man of the Mountain* in 1939; and her final book, *Seraph on the Suwanee*, in 1948. Over fifty short stories and essays were published, in such publications as *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Reader's Digest*, *American Mercury*, *World Telegram*, and *Negro Digest*. During the 1930s Hurston also worked on musical productions based on the stories she collected in her travels. One of Hurston's recent

biographers, Deborah G. Plant, commented that *Moses, Man of the Mountain* is Hurston's "underread second masterpiece" (second to *Their Eyes Were Watching God*); according to Plant, in terms of Hurston's published works, "*Moses, Man of the Mountain* is Hurston's fullest realization of her ideas and philosophy on spirituality, empowerment, freedom, and peace."<sup>4</sup>

*Moses, Man of the Mountain* was Hurston's second novel; the book was published by Lippincott's in November of 1939. Hurston had been at work on the novel for at least five years; she had published a short story in 1934, "The Fire and the Cloud," that had Moses as its protagonist. Hurston had worked on the novel during the semester the Rosenwald Foundation funded her study at Columbia University; she had submitted a draft to Lippincott's in the spring of 1935.<sup>5</sup> *Moses, Man of the Mountain* is a retelling of the story of Moses leading the enslaved Hebrews out of Egypt; the Moses depicted in the biblical Book of Exodus is blended with the Moses of African American folklore. I argue in this chapter that another source for the novel was what would have been cutting-edge biblical studies of Hurston's time.

The novel *Moses, Man of the Mountain* received some good reviews: a week after it was published, a reviewer in the *Saturday Review of Literature* wrote: "It is not a logically projected work, but it has racial vitality, a dramatic intensity worthy of its gifted author."<sup>6</sup> In the *New York Times*, the reviewer wrote: "It is warm with friendly personality and pulsating with homely and profound eloquence and religious fervor. The author has done an exceptionally fine piece of work far off the beaten tracks of literature. Her homespun book is literature in every best sense of the word."<sup>7</sup> One of Hurston's biographers, Valerie Boyd, comments on the reception of the novel by "Hurston's growing gang of black male critics":

Alain Locke thought it was "caricature instead of portraiture." The young writer Ralph Ellison was even harsher: "For Negro fiction," he wrote, "it did nothing." Locke and Richard Wright both had publicly dared Hurston to move beyond folklore—to step off the porches of Eatonville and into an examination of contemporary racial issues. In *Moses*, Hurston did just that. But because she cast her social concerns in terms of antiquity and cloaked her protest in humor, many critics failed to recognize the novel's depth. To Hurston's belittlers, *Moses* was another example of her insistence on writing what Locke called "folklore fiction," and it was more evidence of her alleged refusal to deal with racial issues or contemporary political concerns—precisely what *Moses* was all about.<sup>8</sup>

Hemenway called *Moses, Man of the Mountain* "a noble failure";<sup>9</sup> he also referred to the work as "by far Hurston's most ambitious book."<sup>10</sup> Hemenway does some work to determine some of Hurston's sources, those that were not either obviously biblical or obviously drawn from folklore she had collected either in the South or in the Caribbean; he suggests that, given

Hurston's portrayal of Moses as an Egyptian general, she was using the first-century CE Jewish historian Josephus's *Antiquities of the Jews*.<sup>11</sup> Hemenway also suggests that Hurston may have read Sigmund Freud's two 1937 articles in the German psychoanalytical journal *Imago*; these two articles later appeared in Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*, published in English in 1939.<sup>12</sup> I think that Hurston drew on parts of Josephus's works—she certainly used his writings for her later, unfinished, work on Herod the Great—but there are decided differences at important points; I shall point out these differences further on in this article. I doubt that Hurston used any of Freud's work on Moses; she would already have turned in a first draft to Lippincott's before the *Imago* articles appeared in 1937. Hurston mentions, in a July 1, 1935, letter to Edwin Embree, the president of the Julius Rosenwald Fund, that she had turned in a first draft of the novel *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, to her publisher.<sup>13</sup> In a letter to Edwin Osgood Grover, a professor at Rollins College, dated December 29, 1935, Hurston mentions the novel again, saying that she has to keep on working on it, as well as on another book (*Tell My Horse*).<sup>14</sup> Later in this chapter I touch on differences between Freud's and Hurston's historical settings of the Moses story.

I now turn to the evidence in the novel for Hurston's use of the biblical studies of her day as one source for *Moses, Man of the Mountain*. Susan Edwards Meisenhelder has already noted that Hurston knew and used W. M. Flinders Petrie's *Egyptian Tales* as the basis for "The Book of Thoth" that Hurston's Moses finds.<sup>15</sup> In other words, scholars have already noted that Hurston availed herself of the current scholarship of her day. I argue that Hurston knew and used a theory called "the Kenite Hypothesis," popular among biblical studies scholars at the time Hurston wrote *Moses, Man of the Mountain*. In her novel, Hurston emphasizes a number of times something that is certainly not emphasized in the biblical narrative—that the Israelites in Egypt are without a god; according to *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, the Israelites find their god in Midian, the land to which, in both the biblical narrative and in the novel, Moses escapes after his murder of the Egyptian foreman.<sup>16</sup> Midian is the land where, again according to both the biblical narrative and *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, Moses encounters Zipporah's father, Jethro, a priest of Midian.

Early in *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, Moses's father Amram is in conversation about the Pharaoh with a friend, Caleb; Amram says: "And look what he done! Passed a law we can't go into the temples no more. He says their gods ain't our gods." Caleb responds: "Like what other gods do we know anything about. It gives you a real empty feeling not to have no gods anymore."<sup>17</sup> Hurston has Miriam, about two-thirds of the way through the novel, identify the Egyptian gods as her own: "But we do know something about our gods back in Egypt," Miriam went on. "Maybe that's how come

we having such a hard time, because we done give up our gods. . . . Did the Bull God Apis ever go back on us? No!"<sup>18</sup>

About halfway through the novel, Jethro speaks to Moses: "You know, Moses, I been thinking we're kind of selfish. Here we done found out about the one true God." Later, on the same page: "How about them Israelites? They're down in Egypt without no god of their own and no more protection than a bareheaded mule."<sup>19</sup> Shortly after this, Jethro refers to the Israelites in Egypt as a people "with no particular god."<sup>20</sup> Hurston imagines the following conversation between Jethro and Moses:

"I had thought to take you to the mountain soon, but—" "That is where I want to go. Why do you forbid me to go?" "Because you are not ready to go, Moses. That mountain is holy ground. Our people have worshipped on that mountain for many generations. So many that I don't know my own self. But God and the mountain can wait. You are still a young man." "Why do you say that mountain is holy, Jethro? Why did the Kenites start to worshipping there in the beginning?" . . . [Jethro then says]: "But I *feel* the command to bring other people besides the Kenites to know this god and worship him."<sup>21</sup>

A few paragraphs beyond this, in the course of the same conversation, Jethro uses the name "The great I AM"; later in *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, when Moses encounters the burning bush, the name of the deity I AM WHAT I AM is revealed to him; this parallels the biblical narrative's account of the origin of the divine name YHWH (vocalized as *Yahweh*) in Exod. 3:1–5:

Moses said to God, "Look, when I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what am I to say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO AM." He added: "Thus you must say to the Israelites, 'I AM sent me to you.'" God again spoke to Moses, "Thus you must say to the Israelites: YHWH, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is my name forever; this is my title for all generations."

Hurston combined in her novel the biblical story of Moses's encounter on Mount Sinai/Horeb with a particular academic biblical studies theory current in Hurston's time. Hurston's frequent use in *Moses, Man of the Mountain* of the designation "Kenites" for a particular Midianite tribe (a designation that is found nowhere in the biblical story of Moses in Midian, although in two places in the Book of Judges the designation "Kenite" is used to refer to Moses's father-in-law), the numerous references in the novel to the Israelites' lack of a god in Egypt (references not gleaned from the biblical text, where twice in the first chapter of Exodus we read that the Hebrew midwives feared God), and the Israelites' subsequent acquaintance with "the great I AM" through the offices of Jethro, Moses's father-in-law, suggest that Hurs-

ton knew of the “Kenite Hypothesis,” a well-known and well-respected theory circulating at the time Hurston wrote her novel.

Julian Morgenstern, the president of Hebrew Union College from 1921 until 1947 and a biblical scholar who was president of both the American Oriental Society and the Society of Biblical Literature, wrote in a 1940 article in the *Hebrew Union College Annual* on the Book of Amos:

Of the Kenites themselves, we know very little. They were a semi-nomadic tribe, or perhaps more exactly, clan or group of clans, whose normal abode and district of pastoral wanderings centered in the extreme south of Judah and in the border sections of Edom. Whether, in addition to following a pastoral life, they also were a clan or tribe of smiths, as their name seems to indicate and as their tribal tradition corroborates . . . can not be determined with certainty, but it is by no means impossible. They seem to have been the original worshippers of the particular Yahweh of the mountain in the desert, and from them . . . the worship of this Deity was communicated to . . . the clan or clans just emerging from Egypt.<sup>22</sup>

In an earlier (1921) article in the *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, Morgenstern wrote concerning Exodus 18 (a chapter that had traditionally been understood as describing Jethro’s conversion to the worship of YHWH):

There (v.1) also Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, is called “the priest of Midian.” Moreover, as 18:8-10 implies, Yahwe, the deity of this mountain, is of old well known to Jethro. He and his tribe have, presumably, worshipped Yahwe as a desert deity for many generations. . . . These verses picture Jethro unmistakably as the original worshipper of Yahwe, and indicate that the meaning of the tradition in Exodus, chapter 3, is not that Moses was the first discoverer of this deity, but merely that this deity, worshipped from of old by Jethro and his tribe, now for the first time reveals himself in person, as it were, to Moses. . . .<sup>23</sup>

The Kenite Hypothesis made YHWH a god of the Kenite tribe of the Midianites; Jethro, according to the Kenite Hypothesis, was a priest of YHWH when he met Moses. This Kenite Hypothesis was widely accepted in the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries; H. H. Rowley, in a footnote in *From Joseph to Joshua*, drawn from his 1948 Schweich Lectures, remarked that the Kenite Hypothesis had gained “wide acceptance,” and that “it figures in large numbers of works.”<sup>24</sup> Martin Buber, in his work *Moses*, refers to the Hypothesis as “beloved” (not, however, by him—Buber disagreed with the Kenite Hypothesis, arguing instead, on the basis of a traditional reading of Exodus 18, that Jethro was converted to the worship of YHWH by Moses, not vice versa).<sup>25</sup> In a history of Israel published in the early 1930s by Theodore Robinson we find:

This was Yahweh. His name and original worshippers have been the subject of much discussion. He seems to have been the local El of the sacred mountain and of its neighborhood, especially of the tribe of Midian or, perhaps, of the Kenites. The latter suggestion rests on several important facts. The Kenites were the smiths of the ancient nomad tribes of the east. . . . More than any other of that age or district they were in the habit of using fire, and undoubtedly Yahweh is a fire-God, although he has other attributes as well. In Judges iv.11 the father-in-law of Moses is called Hobab the Kenite, and in Judges i.16 he is an unnamed Kenite. . . . These facts make it clear that in one form of the ancient tradition it was among Kenites that Moses learned to know Yahweh, and this tradition may be the earliest.<sup>26</sup>

I mention Morgenstern, Rowley, Buber, and Robinson to demonstrate that the Kenite Hypothesis was very much current in the field of biblical studies during the time Hurston would have written *Moses, Man of the Mountain*. Rowley writes, in *From Joseph to Joshua*: "It has long been a common view that Yahweh was the God whose priest Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, was."<sup>27</sup> The Kenite Hypothesis was popularized especially by K. Budde, in *Religion of Israel to the Exile*, published by Putnam's in 1899;<sup>28</sup> another important book that picked up and promoted the Kenite Hypothesis was G. B. Gray's *Sacrifice in the Old Testament*, published in 1925. Gray writes: "If the surmise is correct, then Moses was not represented in the earliest tradition merely as the son-in-law of the priest of Midian, but also as his pupil in the priestly method or craft, and thus the Hebrew priesthood is affiliated to the Midianite."<sup>29</sup> In Hurston's novel, Jethro is presented as Moses's teacher; eventually Moses, the pupil, outshines Jethro, the teacher, but Jethro is portrayed as initiating Moses into secret knowledge. For example: "He learned the secrets of plants and animals, and the living and the giving earth. Long years had passed since he embraced the religion of Jethro. . . . Jethro now sat at his feet in all things expect one. Jethro was still his master in magic. . . ."<sup>30</sup>

The overlap between the Kenite Hypothesis as it was described by Morgenstern, Robinson, Budde, Gray, Buber, and Rowley (the first three writing and publishing before Hurston finished her novel, the last two making it clear that by the 1940s the Kenite Hypothesis was simply in the academic biblical studies air) and sections of Hurston's *Moses, Man of the Mountain* suggest to me that she knew and used this Hypothesis in her work. To reiterate: the Kenite Hypothesis asserts that YHWH was the deity of the Kenites, a tribe in Midian; it was in Midian that the Israelites first became acquainted with this deity and claim this god as their own. Jethro, a member of this Kenite tribe, initiates Moses into this YHWH worship. Reading *Moses, Man of the Mountain* through the lens of the Kenite Hypothesis explains some of Hurston's deviations from and additions to the biblical text. For example, the insistence in the novel that the Israelites, during their sojourn in Egypt, did not have any gods other than the Egyptian gods.<sup>31</sup> The Kenite Hypothesis is a relic of an

earlier age in historical-critical methodologies—in Zora Neale Hurston’s day, however, it represented the newest thinking in the academy on how the Israelites came to know the deity called YHWH.

Other evidence from *Moses, Man of the Mountain* that I believe supports my idea that Hurston was availing herself of the academic biblical scholarship of her time is the preponderance of references to a group of people never mentioned in the Hebrew Bible: the Hyksos. “Hyksos” is an Egyptian word meaning “foreign rulers”; it refers to western Asiatic immigrants who installed themselves in the Egyptian delta and ruled Egypt from approximately 1700 BCE to 1500 BCE, when they were expelled. From the personal names of the Hyksos preserved in Egyptian texts (texts that would have become accessible to scholars only from about the middle of the nineteenth century, after the decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphics), it seems that at least some of the Hyksos spoke a Semitic language (in other words, a language related to Aramaic and Hebrew; Ancient Egyptian belongs to a different language family). As I mentioned earlier, the word “Hyksos” is never mentioned in the Bible, but it occurs frequently in Hurston’s novel. The following are some examples of Hurston’s references to the Hyksos in her novel. The examples are in the form of speeches on the part of Egyptians; the first quote is the ruminations of the Egyptian Pharaoh:

Here they were, Hebrews, who had come down into Egypt as the allies and aides of those oppressors of the Egyptian people, and as such had trampled on the proud breast of Egyptian liberty for more than three hundred years. But the gods had used the magnificent courage of the real Egyptians to finally conquer and expel those sheep-herding interlopers whom the Hebrews had aided in every way they could to deprive the real Egyptians of their homes and liberties.<sup>32</sup>

In these lines, the word “Hyksos” is not mentioned, there is simply a reference to the “oppressors of the Egyptian people,” whom the Hebrews had aided. On the next page, however, Pharaoh continues to meditate on the wrongs done to the Egyptian people, and he explicitly names these “oppressors”: “[A] most reprehensible and low-down trick worthy only of Hyksos and Hebrews!”<sup>33</sup> The Pharaoh continues: “It was our highly developed war chariots that swept out the Hyksos.” The Hyksos are mentioned again: “Are those horsemen Egyptians or are they Hebrews and their allies, the hated Hyksos?”<sup>34</sup>

A mention of the Hyksos does appear in Josephus’s *Against Apion*, in Book I. Hemenway has suggested that Hurston might have availed herself of the works of this first-century CE Jewish historian.<sup>35</sup> In *Against Apion*, when Josephus mentions the Hyksos he is quoting the work of an earlier (third-century BCE) Egyptian historian, Manetho; according to Josephus, Manetho had written with reference to a series of foreign rulers in Egypt: “And these

six were the first rulers among them, who were all along making war with the Egyptians, and were very desirous to destroy them to their very roots. This whole nation was styled HYCSOS, that is, 'shepherd-kings.'" After providing this information from Manetho, Josephus goes on to dispute Manetho's etymology of the name "Hyksos," giving his own suggestion about the origins of the name. While it is possible that Hurston did read of the Hyksos in Josephus's *Against Apion*, nothing in her novel picks up on the two etymologies, made much of by both earlier historians.

The Hyksos were much discussed in the academic literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. An example of this literature is James Breasted's *A History of Egypt*, first published in 1905; in discussing how the tribes associated with the Israelites might have made their way into Egypt, Breasted has this to say about the relationship between the Hebrews and the Hyksos: "That it [the Hyksos empire] was a Semitic empire we cannot doubt, in view of the Manethonian [a reference to the third-century BCE Egyptian historian quoted by Josephus] tradition and the subsequent conditions in Syria-Palestine. . . . Such an incident would account surprisingly well for the entrance of these tribes into Egypt, which on any hypothesis must have taken place at about this age; and in that case the Hebrews in Egypt will have been but a part of the Beduin allies of the Kadesh or Hyksos empire. . . ." <sup>36</sup> Hurston has her Pharaoh refer to the Hyksos as the allies of the Hebrews; in Breasted's work, as well as in other literature of the early twentieth-century, this same connection is made. In the 1932 *History of Israel*, at the point when Robinson is discussing the descent into Egypt narrated at the end of the Book of Genesis, we read:

There is, however, no reason to suspect the substantial historicity of the narrative. It would be unusual, but by no means impossible, for an individual to rise from a lowly position, and the process would, no doubt, be facilitated if the new-comer were an Aramaean, and the time were that of the Hyksos dominion in Egypt. As a matter of fact, on every ground this seems the best, if not the only period to which we can assign the entry of the ancestors of Egypt into Egypt, for the hostility to the Asiatics roused by the Hyksos dominion was so great that it is almost inconceivable that any king of the eighteenth dynasty should have welcomed a Semitic tribe for any reason whatsoever, though they might well impress them as slaves. <sup>37</sup>

Hurston's frequent use of "Hyksos," a word that never occurs in the Hebrew Bible, to refer to a group allied with the Hebrews indicates to me that she must have done some reading (perhaps from Breasted, but not necessarily—many scholars picked up the idea that the Hyksos's invasion and domination of Egypt was related to the Israelite immigration to Egypt) about the theory that the conquest of Egypt by the western Asiatic, Semitic-language-speaking Hyksos would have occasioned immigration of tribes of Semitic back-

ground into Egypt; the eventual expulsion of these foreign conquerors would have, according to much of the academic literature of Hurston's time, led to a backlash against the descendants of those immigrants. Again, as with the Kenite Hypothesis, much of what was written about the Hyksos-Israelite connection would be either nuanced or dismissed by modern biblical scholars; in the time period when Hurston was writing, however, this Hyksos scholarship was new and cutting edge.

There is yet another indication that Hurston was drawing from academic biblical studies theories. When Moses (referred to in this passage in *Moses, Man of the Mountain* by his Egyptian name, Suten-Rech), wants to escape Egypt after he has killed the supervisor, he gets into a conversation with a fisherman, who tells him: "Look, you walk down the beach about two miles north and you come to a narrow neck of water, where the Red Sea joins the outer sea. . . . If a man started at the hour when the tide is lowest, before it rushes back he could be on the other side. . . ." <sup>38</sup> This passage suggests that Hurston was well aware of theories that the Exodus event, specifically the crossing of the Red Sea, might have occurred differently than what is portrayed in the biblical narrative of Exodus 14. As early as the 1880s, Julius Wellhausen's article on Israel in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* argued that the fleeing Hebrews, subjected to forced labor in Egypt, escaped by fording "the northern arm" of the Red Sea; the water of this "shallow sea" was blown back by a high wind. This theory that what most translations called the "Red Sea" was actually a much shallower body of water, located somewhere north of the present day Red Sea, was commonplace in academic works of the 1930s. Robinson, for example, writes:

We have no means of knowing for certain where the crossing took place. Those who would locate Sinai to the east of the Gulf of Akaba will naturally find the spot at the northern end of that gulf. On other grounds, the more natural place will be north of the modern Suez. The sandy stretch between Suez and the southern end of the Bitter Lakes is raised only a few feet above sea-level, and was probably wholly or partially covered with water in ancient times. Shallow water of this kind may easily be driven back by a strong wind, leaving the sand bare. With the dropping of the wind the water returns, coming, probably, under the sand first, as it does in so many such places with the tide, and forming a quicksand in which the wheels of the chariots would first sink. <sup>39</sup>

Hurston names the Pharaoh of the Exodus event "Ta-Phar"; in the scene where Moses confronts Ta-Phar and his wife, she writes: "Moses could picture just how fretful Ta-Phar and his wife had been while they waited for Rameses the Great to die." Here, I think for the only time in the novel, Hurston identifies the Pharaoh of the oppression, the Pharaoh who orders the killing of the Hebrew children, with Rameses II, who reigned over sixty

years in the thirteenth century BCE. In the biblical narrative the name of the Pharaoh associated with the oppression is never given; in Exod. 1:11 mention is made of the Israelites' forced labor on the cities of Pithom and Raamses. In James Breasted's *A History of Egypt* we find this, in a section on Rameses II and his building projects: "There is probably little question of the correctness of the Hebrew tradition in attributing the oppression of some tribe of their ancestors to the builder of Pithom and Ramses; that a tribe of their forefathers should have fled the country to escape such labour is quite in accord with what we know of the time."<sup>40</sup> I point out Hurston's identification of Rameses II as the pharaoh of the oppression in part because it supports my argument that Hurston was relying on the academic biblical studies of her time when she wrote *Moses, Man of the Mountain*. I mention it also because this identification of Rameses II as the pharaoh of the oppression, an identification in line with the best biblical scholarship of her time, puts her at odds with Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*; as I mentioned earlier, some scholars have claimed that Hurston used the first two chapters of Freud's work as a source. Freud wrote, "I venture now to draw the following conclusion: if Moses was an Egyptian and if he transmitted to the Jews his own religion, then it was that of Ikhnaton, the Aton religion."<sup>41</sup> Freud argues for a Moses in the time of a pharaoh named Ikhnaton, a variant spelling of the name of the pharaoh Akhenaton, who reigned in the middle of the fourteenth century BCE; Akhenaton's reign ended about sixty years before Rameses II took the throne in Egypt.<sup>42</sup> In light of this significant difference between Hurston's *Moses, Man of the Mountain* and Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* (the former associating the pharaoh of the oppression with Rameses II, the latter placing Moses in the fourteenth century BCE, with Akhenaton), I think it is very doubtful that Hurston leaned on Freud's work as a source. Not only do we have the difference in pharaoh's interacting with Moses, but Hurston insists in her novel that monotheism is a product of the encounter with Jethro and YHWH in Midian.

Now to the question of where Hurston came across some of the biblical scholarship that she used in her novel. I suggest that she was introduced to some of these ideas in the course of her academic work at Barnard College and Columbia University, whether in a formal class situation or in informal discussion or reading. I have had some success uncovering the classes Hurston took at both Columbia and Barnard. As I mentioned earlier, after finishing her B.A. in Anthropology at Barnard College, Hurston started graduate work in anthropology at Columbia University. She enrolled Columbia in the spring of 1935, funded by the Rosenwald Foundation, for a semester of "general ethnology." In a letter Hurston wrote, dated January 18, 1935, to Dorothy Elvidge, Hurston listed the courses she was taking that first term of graduate work: Mythology, Primitive Art, French Phonetics, General Methods, Evolution.<sup>43</sup> Under Boas's supervision, sponsored by Columbia Univer-

sity, Hurston then returned to the South with a fourteen hundred dollar research fellowship, with the task of collecting African American folklore, and her formal Anthropology classes came to an end.

The only course on Hurston's transcript from Barnard College that might have exposed her to the scholarly works I have mentioned earlier is a course entitled Anthropology 107: Traditional Literature, taught by Dr. Gladys Reichard. The course description for this class for the years 1926–1927 reads: "Primitive literature in the Old and New Worlds. Form and content of tradition: the proverb, riddle, folk tale, myth, fairy-tale, romance, adventure, novel, verse and song. Types of character and plot. Mythological styles defined. This course aims to acquaint students with valuable material which is not generally known, rather than to develop mythological theories, although the latter will be briefly discussed."

Reading lists for the Columbia courses and for Anthropology 107 are not available, so it is impossible to determine with certainty whether it was during her academic studies that she came across the academic biblical studies she then drew on as sources when she wrote *Moses, Man of the Mountain*. These classes would have equipped Hurston with the skills necessary to do independent research into biblical studies, and her association with Barnard, Columbia, and Boas would have given her access to library resources. I do believe that some elements of Hurston's novel—for example, her insistence in the novel that the Israelites are dependent on the Egyptian gods before they encounter YHWH in Midian, as well as her use of the word "Hyksos"—must have been drawn from her research and study of biblical studies. I cannot, of course, say that Hurston read Budde, or Wellhausen, or Breasted, but the evidence suggests to me that she availed herself of the contemporary, cutting-edge biblical studies scholarship before or during her writing of *Moses, Man of the Mountain*.

## NOTES

1. Robert Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1977), 21.

2. Carla Kaplan, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters* (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 32–7.

3. Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston*, 6.

4. Deborah Plant, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Biography of the Spirit* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007), 125.

5. Kaplan, *Zora Neale Hurston*, 355.

6. Valerie Boyd, *Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 335.

7. Boyd, *Wrapped in Rainbows*, 336.

8. Ibid. See also Catherine A. John, "That Man in the Gutter is the God-Maker," in *The Inside Light: New Critical Essays on Zora Neale Hurston*, ed. Deborah G. Plant (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010), 173.

9. Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston*, 270. Carolyn M. Jones has also noted Hurston's use of both Josephus and Philo in her portrait of Moses. "Freedom and Identity in Hurston's *Moses, Man of the Mountain*," in *Approaches to Teaching Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God and Other Works*, ed. John Lowe (New York: MLA, 2009), 106.

10. Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston*, 256.

11. *Ibid.*, 261. Josephus had been the head of Jewish forces in the Galilee during the first Jewish revolt; after his surrender to Roman forces in 67 CE, he took up history writing. His works (the best known of which are *The Jewish War* and *The Antiquities of the Jews*) are valuable for the insights they provide into first-century CE Judaism. His work *Antiquities of the Jews* is a multivolume history of the Jewish people; it begins with the creation of Adam and Eve and continues up to the first Jewish revolt, in which he took part.

12. Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston*, 257.

13. Kaplan, *Zora Neale Hurston*, 355.

14. *Ibid.*, 363.

15. Susan Edwards Meisenhelder, *Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick: Race and Gender in the Work of Zora Neale Hurston* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama, 1999), 123–26.

16. The biblical story of Moses's escape to Midian and his meeting with the seven daughters of Jethro, the priest of Midian, is told in Exod. 2:15–22. According to Genesis, the Midianites were the descendants of Midian, a son of Abraham and Keturah (Gen. 25:1–2). The biblical narratives place Midian east of the Gulf of Aqaba, in northwest Arabia.

17. Zora Neale Hurston, *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991), 5.

18. *Ibid.*, 230.

19. *Ibid.*, 121.

20. *Ibid.*, 129.

21. *Ibid.*, 105.

22. Julian Morgenstern, "The Historical Antecedents of Amos," *HUCA* 15 (1940): 127–29.

23. Julian Morgenstern, "The Elohist Narrative in Exodus 3:1–15," *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 37, no. 4 (1921): 249.

24. Harold Rowley, *From Joseph to Joshua* (London: Oxford University, 1950), 150.

25. Martin Buber, *Moses* (Oxford and London: East and West Library, 1947), 51.

26. Theodore Robinson, *A History of Israel* (London: Oxford University, 1932), 92.

27. Rowley, *From Joseph to Joshua*, 149.

28. Karl Budde, *Religion of Israel to the Exile* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1899), 17–38.

29. George Gray, *Sacrifice in the Old Testament* (New York: Ktav, 1971), 208.

30. Hurston, *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, 111.

31. *Ibid.*, 5.

32. *Ibid.*, 19.

33. *Ibid.*, 20.

34. *Ibid.*, 48–49.

35. Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston*, 261.

36. James Breasted, *The History of Egypt from the Earliest Times to the Persian Conquest* (New York: C. Scribner's, 1905), 220.

37. Robinson, *A History of Israel*, 62–63.

38. Hurston, *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, 77.

39. Robinson, *A History of Israel*, 87.

40. Breasted, *The History of Egypt*, 316.

41. Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1939), 33.

42. Akhenaton (or Akhenaten) reigned for about seventeen years, dying in 1336 or 1334 BCE. He abandoned traditional polytheism, insisting on the worship of Aten. After his death, traditional Egyptian religious practices were restored, and Akhenaton disappeared from history. When Akhetaten (Akhenaton's capital city, dedicated to Aten) was excavated in the nineteenth century and religious texts came to light and were translated, there was a rush to suggest that

monotheism had its origins with Akhenaton. So, for example, Louis Untermeyer's novel *Moses* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1928) depicts Moses growing up with Akhenaton.

43. Kaplan, *Zora Neale Hurston*, 339–40.