

Amy's Top 10 (okay, 13) Books of 2012

It's the big 1-3. That's a lucky 13 years of pulling together my Top 10 book list. In honor of the 13th year, I've selected 13 books, a tasty baker's dozen of literary goodness to keep you between the covers all year long.

The number 13 has always been a magical number for me. Dave and I were married on April 13. I will graduate with an MFA in Creative Writing in 2013 (barring any unforeseen delays). I've lived in 13 different dorms, apartments and houses since I was 18. I received my first record player (yeah, I'm *that* old) along with Michael Jackson's "Off the Wall" record when I was 13 – I still remember that birthday slumber party with my girlfriends. I was born in '67 ($6 + 7 = 13$; this is pushing it, I know). And our first and fabulous Australian Shepherd, Autumn, enriched our lives for 13 years.

Magical also sums up the theme that runs through the books that appear on this year's list, but before I get into the Top 10 theme for this year in reading, I'll share a few magical moments from our year. On the truly magical and wonderful front, Dave's tenure-and-promotion votes were unanimous and enthusiastic through the college level, and the only step left in the process is for Kent State's Provost to sign on the dotted line. As I've said in years past, the tenure process is grueling. I am so proud of Dave for all that he has accomplished over the last six years. Through it all, his students remained his top priority. Not once did he let his passion for teaching take a backseat to research or other academic pressures, of which there are plenty. His students love and respect him, and he's gained a solid reputation as one of the best teachers in the department, and at Kent State overall.

Even though he published several papers and was named one of the "Top 50 Sociology Professors You Should Be Following on Twitter" (check out the impressive Twitteratti list: <http://tinyurl.com/89p4ln8>), his biggest shining moment was mentoring his rock star undergraduate student Lora Phillips-Lassus, who, with his guidance and support, received a full ride to The Ohio State University to begin her graduate studies. I had the honor and the privilege to observe Dave teaching during his 250-student Introduction to Sociology class. I found myself wishing that all of my high school and undergraduate professors had been as engaging and passionate about their work as Dave. Those teachers who exhibited the same passion remain my all-time favorites: Pam Vissing (who will be reading this, I hope!), Connie Robinson, Pat Westfall, Eric Wagner, Drew Evarts, and Daniel Keyes. These are the teachers I have to thank for influencing my career and my writing life.

With his focus on tenure, Dave's musical pursuits simmered on the backburner. He finished recording several songs with his Prospect + Pioneer bandmates, but when they moved out of Northeast Ohio the sound of music in our house came mostly from the stereo. We're hoping that changes in 2013.

While Dave made his final lap around the tenure track, I moved through my second year as a part-time graduate student in the Northeast Ohio Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing Program (NEOMFA). The biggest news here is that I started to work on my thesis and dedicated at least one day of each weekend to writing. The pages are accumulating and my goal is to submit a full manuscript – versus the 150 pages required – come Summer 2013.

I published three short stories this year. The first came as a huge surprise. I submitted a short-short to a short story contest sponsored by *The Writer* magazine and took first place, winning \$1,000! The story will be included in the February 2013 issue of the magazine. The second story was published in the Fall 2012 issue of *Rubbertop Review*. Order your copy here: <http://tinyurl.com/62b4e7w>. The third story is included in *A Few Good Words*, an anthology produced by the Cincinnati Writer's Project. Funny enough, the anthology includes 113 – there's that lucky number again – stories and poems. Even though we haven't

lived in Cincinnati for six years, I still stay in touch with this fantastic and eclectic crew of writers. Check out the anthology here: <http://tinyurl.com/c687ufl>.

In the realm of big changes this year, I transitioned out of the Pearle Vision brand to a position in Corporate Communications within Luxottica. After seven years with Pearle, I was sad to leave my friends, but very honored to be working again with my very first manager at Luxottica, Kathy Clark. She's a top-notch, strategic leader, and incredibly intelligent and funny to boot!

Many of our magical moments took place while traveling to Cincinnati, New York, New Orleans, Florida, Maine, and Boston. We miss city life and we miss our hometown pals so we took planes, trains and automobiles to satisfy our city-and-friend fix. We headed south to Cincinnati over the summer and on Thanksgiving weekend, whereupon I ran the Thanksgiving Day Race, a 10k that stands as one of my all-time favorite traditions. Good friend and fellow book lover Jessica Nielsen ran the race for the first time, and it was awesome to share in her first-time 10k excitement. Dave and I also sipped the traditional post-run pint at Crowley's in Mount Adams, catching up with my running buddy Suzi Sifri, and seeing Rhonda Hampton, a true blast from our past, along with her son Jonathan.

Dave surprised me with Broadway tickets to *Death of a Salesman*, featuring Phillip Seymour Hoffman as Willy Loman. As incredibly depressing as this play is, the performance was off-the-charts brilliant and powerful, and we had the rest of the fun weekend (along with a Paul Weller concert and several slices of pizza) to balance out the serious intensity of the performance. In New Orleans, we met up with friends Neal Weiss and Colleen Morrissey, a fellow book lover. True story: Dave and Neal met through an internet discussion board years ago, and we've only seen Neal and Colleen three times since our friendship began. Funny how you can travel so well with a couple you see maybe once every seven to ten years! We ate, we drank, we second-lined, we hung out at Kermit Ruffins' place, and we met Uncle Lionel Batiste, a New Orleans musical icon who passed away later in the year. Dave went back to NOLA a second time for a boys' trip that included mucho drinking, eating, and second-line parading. In Maine and Boston, we did some hiking and sightseeing. Maine is beautiful and we had some of the best Thai food ever in Portland. I also have this vacation to thank for helping me crank out some thesis pages, giving me the time to read my Number 1 pick on this year's list, and allowing me to test out reading a novel on my iPad for the first time ever. So, yay for Maine! In Florida, we did a whole bunch of nothing to recover from the long semester and we met with friends Bren and Pat for dinner and drinks. I met Pat through an online writing course (Hello to the Gotham Girls!!) and a few of us from that class have stayed in touch. One of these days, we'll all be attending each other's readings and signing each other's best-selling novel.

To cap off the year, I also had the pleasure of traveling to Italy! The trip was work-related, but I had plenty of time see the sights in Milan and Venice and to shop for shoes. I came home with a pair of boots and two pairs of heels. I also brought home a fractured arm. In true Lucille Ball fashion, I fell coming out of Luxottica's global headquarters and spent the next four days of the trip with a wonky arm. The arm is on the mend, though I think it'll take me a little longer to recover from the embarrassment of wiping out at the global headquarters. If nothing else, I've become well-versed at using my left hand to cook, open doors, dry my hair, and generally make it through the day without using my dominant hand – magical how the body adjusts!

In a year when reality bared its fangs, I found solace in literature. It was here that I discovered the magic and the mystery and the moments that made my heart and soul smile a little wider. It was here that I could leave hard work behind and simply just “be” with the characters. It was here that I entered other worlds and discover something new or, more importantly, uncovered something about myself through the narrative.

When I pulled together the stack of books for the list, I realized that so many of stories included a magical thread. Not the bippity-boppity-boo fairy godmother kind – though we could all use that kind of magic some days – or the Harry Potter or Hobbit kind. These stories contain the kinds of magical threads that enchant and captivate readers, and rekindle that childlike sense of wonder that anything is possible with a little bit of imagination and luck. These stories brought light and laughter into my life and reminded me that the world – both fictional and real – is filled with incredible talent, creativity, and, dare I say it, hope.

I'll leave you with the two mantras I'll be chanting in 2013. The first is “live in the light.” I read this in an article in *Yoga Journal* and it stuck with me. I've been using it on long runs and also just before I sit down to write. The second comes from my friend Karen. Her yoga instructor talked about setting a goal to have a Balanced and Blissful year. Sounds like just the ticket for all of us in 2013.

Here's hoping that your 2013 is filled with plenty of magical and blissful moments. Whether it's online, on a handheld device, or with an old-fashioned paperback, keep on reading!

Amy

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“Has the whole world gone crazy? Am I the only one around here who gives a shit about the rules?”

-Respectfully lifted from Walter Sobchak (*The Big Lebowski*)

I have but a few ground rules:

- I send you the list. You forward it on to other book-loving friends. The fun part is discovering where the list travels. For a few years in a row, it's traveled to bibliophiles in Chile and Ireland (Hi Ann!). There are also spectacular book groups in Ohio and California awaiting this list (Thanks Cindy and Colleen!). Anyone who puts this list in the hands of Dave Grohl, Martin Sheen, Rob Lowe, Alice Munro, Kevin Brockmeier, Richard Russo, or Barack and Michelle Obama will have my eternal gratitude. I'm an ever-hopeful kind of gal; don't let me down.
- The books I recommend are not always published in the list's given year. Why limit yourself to one year when there are so many great stories that deserve your attention?
- Let me know what you're reading – a lot of your recommendations make it on the list. You'll get full credit for the reco. And, if you end up hating one of my recos, let me know, too. I like a good literary debate.
- The Top 10 is not in rank order with the exception of my Number One pick which is most definitely number one. The other nine are books you should buy or borrow, and read.

1. Night Circus, Erin Morgenstern

Jessica Nielsen, my good friend and fellow bookavore (that's like carnivore but with books instead of meat), recommended this to me early in the year, and I let it sit on my nightstand for several months. When I finally got around to reading it, it took me less than three days to get to the last page – a minor miracle given that I was finding spare minutes between work and school.

Erin Morgenstern describes her work as a “fairy tale in one way or another.” Color me a fairy tale lover then because I adored this story of two old, rival illusionists battling to the death. Thing is, they're crafty. Instead of putting themselves in the line of deathly fire, they pit two young apprentices – Celia and Marco – against each other. In true fairy tale fashion, the goal of the game is not revealed to Celia and Marco, so naturally they fall in love as they created clever and complex illusions at the Le Cirque de Reves, a circus that arrives without warning and is only open at night.

As their relationship develops, another relationship under the big top is percolating. Young Bailey, a boy who sneaks into the circus, immediately becomes captivated by all he sees, including a mysterious red-headed girl. Bailey's story intertwines with Celia and Marco's as the narrative twists and turns and eventually makes time stand still. Or does it? Morgenstern offers readers high-stakes, high drama, and high imagination with a bizarre circus atmosphere and illusions that feel unique and original. Some critics – mostly those who specialize in fantasy and surrealistic/speculative fiction – found fault with the “logic of the magic.” Others thought Morgenstern could have done more with the idea that all of the children in the narrative are essentially neglected by adults. To them I say, relax and enjoy the fantastical ride without over-analyzing it. As Sir Francis Bacon said: “Some books should be tasted, some devoured, but only a few should be chewed and digested thoroughly.” This bookavore recommends thoroughly digesting *The Night Circus* for all of its enchanting, imaginative beauty.

2. *The Round House*, Louise Erdrich

I read Erdrich's *A Plague of Doves* (recommended a few years ago by Erik Brueggemann) and was looking forward to reading her latest, which won the National Book Award. Fellow Gotham Girl Lyn Taylor confirmed that it was well worth reading. *The Round House* includes a few of the characters from *Doves* and, according to critics, picks up story lines from Erdrich's other novels. That said, you don't have to read *Doves* or her other works first, though it will make *The Round House* even more compelling.

Set on an Ojibwe reservation, *The Round House* focuses on Joe, a 13-year-old whose mother has just been raped. Unable to cope with life outside their home, his mother retreats to her bedroom. Joe and his father are left to attempt to uncover who raped her and why. Mooshum, Joe's grandfather, introduces Joe to some of the spiritual aspects of the tribe as Joe attempts to "find his luck" and find a way to help his mother return to life. Joe encounters a ghost and learns that the crane is his doodem (talisman). Beyond the mystery surrounding his mother's attacker swirls the mystery and magic of Joe becoming a man. He schemes with his friends, spies on a priest (one of the more humorous scenes in the story), and attempts to play detective on his mother's case.

Erdrich's love for her characters and for the North Dakota reservation she has created is apparent on every page. She renders her characters with respect, not stereotype. When she accepted the National Book Award, she said she wanted to acknowledge the "grace and endurance of native women," adding "This is a book about a huge case of injustice ongoing on reservations. Thank you for giving it a wider audience." Read, learn, and enjoy.

3. *State of Wonder*, Ann Patchett

Recommended by several friends including Bobbi Maiers, Kevin Boyle, Lyn Taylor, Wendy New (I think), and Sandy Becker, this book tipped the magical meter in an exotic direction, taking readers into the heart of the Amazon jungle to find a mysterious scientist. The *Chicago Tribune* describes the story as a "riveting variation on the tightly plotted journey from darkness to light" and I don't disagree. I read this book mainly to study plot and structure (full disclosure – I'm terrible at plotting!), yet I found myself riveted by the characters.

Marina Singh, who works for the Vogel Pharmaceutical Company, is sent to the Amazon to figure out why her colleague, Anders, perished there. She's also on a mission to bring rogue scientist Dr. Annik Swenson back to the States. The company sent Dr. Swenson into the jungle to research the fertility of post-menopausal women in the Lakashi tribe but she's yet to send any results or new fertility drugs to the company. Once Marina find Dr. Swenson, she encounters her fair share of jungle creepy crawlies, and, oh, some cannibals. A warning for those with snake phobias: you might want to skip one pivotal scene midway through the story.

Marina uncovers exactly what Dr. Swenson is studying as well as some of her other secrets, and the jungle becomes a strange and wonderful place as Marina's physical and present journey through the Amazon is accompanied by her psychological journey through her past. I love when an author has the grace and style to pull that off and it doesn't feel anvilicious (meaning, this writer is hitting me over the head with her themes and plot points). Marina is the main character but it's Dr. Swenson who steals the show. When she finally appears on the page, you are desperate to know more about her. My only complaint is the story's ending. I didn't find it all that plausible. Let me know what you think after you read it.

4. *The Illumination*, Kevin Brockmeier

You might remember my obsession with Kevin Brockmeier from past Top 10 lists. This year, I was fortunate to hear Brockmeier read during a session on apocalyptic literature at the Association of Writers

and Publishers Conference in Chicago, IL. The panel also included Pickney Benedict, another short story author I adore. I was so stoked. Brockmeier is a quiet fellow, just like the voice in his stories. His reading style matched his writing style – demure and humble, yet you can feel the tension simmering just beneath the surface.

The illumination begins one Friday night after a fatal car accident. Every wound and injury begins to shine. No one knows why but the answer might lie in a diary of love notes written by a husband to his wife. The diary makes its way into the hands of Carol Ann Page and then is passed to five others. The journal links the six stories as does the illumination of wounds, but all six stories could stand alone as novellas and/or longer short stories. For those who don't enjoy short story collections, don't be turned off by the structure. There's enough of a strong connection between the characters that this reads as a novel.

Brockmeier asks readers to consider whether emotional pain, memories, and love are as visible as the illuminated physical pains of the people who populate the pages of the story. As Carol Ann wonders: "Was she seeing their emotional pain, or its physical counterpart, like the raw throat that followed a bout of crying, or the stomach cramps that accompanied a wave of anxiety." If you are a sentimental sort, a person who cherishes memories of loved ones and understands that love can sometimes lead to grief, this fantastical story is for you.

5. *Dear Life*, Alice Munro

Alice Munro should be required reading for anyone who loves to read. Enough said.

6. *Red Weather*, Pauls Toutonghi

It's 1989 and Eastern European Communism has collapsed. The Balodis family is living in Milwaukee and Yuri Balodis, a teenager, is in love with Hannah Graham who calls herself a Marxist. For Yuri's parents, who escaped from Latvia and communism, Yuri's crush and his growing interest in socialism causes a wee bit of tension in the family. But that's not the point or the plot of this novel. The magic in this novel lies in the relationship between Yuri and his father, Rudolfs. Yuri doesn't understand his father and vice versa – classic American teenage angst here –but deftly and sensitively drawn. Yuri commits a crime and tries desperately to hide it from his father, all while his quirky Latvian relatives are visiting.

Both humorous and heartfelt, this novel is just shy of 300 pages and a fun and fast read, especially for those who came up to adulthood as the Berlin Wall came down. Yuri's father, Rudolfs steals the show and you find yourself caring about him just as much as you care for geeky Yuri. I mean, how can you not love Rudolfs, a man who dresses up as Stalin at Halloween because it is the scariest thing he can think of?

7. *The Probable Future*, Alice Hoffman

Seeing as my theme for the year included threads of magic, it shouldn't be surprising to see Alice Hoffman on the list. Hoffman fans know that she has a knack for weaving a magical tale. I picked this up at Last Exit Books in downtown Kent on a lark. I think I paid \$1.50, but Hoffman's work is worth much more than that.

The women of the Sparrow family all have unique gifts. Elinor can spot a lie. Her daughter, Jenny, sees people's dreams. Stella, Jenny's daughter, sometimes sees how a person will die just before it happens. And guess when the women all discover their gifts? On their 13th birthday. Yep, there's that lucky 13 again. The setting is Massachusetts and the Sparrows have been a fixture in the town since the pilgrims landed.

Elinor Sparrow lives in a creepy house with an even creepier cabinet filled with artifacts that outline how some of the Sparrow clan met their demise. Elinor and Jenny don't have the best mother-daughter relationship, and Jenny, recently divorced is losing touch with Stella. Hoffman adds another layer of

conflict when Stella has a vision of a woman dying, which eventually lands her own father in jail. The story twists and unfolds from there. To keep Stella out of the scandal, she is sent to Elinor's house where she uncovers family secrets, finds friendship, and realizes that the Sparrow family has a lot to hide.

Like *Red Weather*, this isn't so much a story about the mysterious death and Stella's vision as much as it is a story about the good, bad and ugly dynamics between mother and daughter and grandmother and granddaughter. I'll be picking up Hoffman's latest, *The Dovekeepers*. It sounds pretty darn interesting if you're so inclined.

8. *The Chemistry of Tears*, Peter Carey

Full disclosure: This is the first novel I've read by the beloved Aussie Peter Carey. Yeah, yeah, I know. I should have read his Booker Prize winner, *The True History of the Kelly Gang*, or maybe *My Life as a Fake*, or *Oscar and Lucinda* blah blah blah. They're on my long short-list of great books I want to read along with a zillion others. Anyhow, this story sounded especially intriguing and magical. Who doesn't love an automaton? Not just any old automaton but possibly the greatest automaton ever built. The story is based on the real-life Digesting Duck, a mechanical duck created by Jacques de Vaucanson in 1739. The mechanical duck could eat corn and then, well, appear to poop it out. But there was a secret. The robotic duck didn't really poop – that was controlled by another container inside the duck. You can learn more on the fabulous interwebs. Just Google digesting duck automaton.

In Carey's story, Catherine Gehrig, secretly grieving the loss of her even more secret lover and colleague, is assigned the impossible task of bringing the automaton back to life. As she begins the work, she discovers a set of notebooks written by the automaton's original owner, Henry Brandling. Henry, two centuries prior, was carrying his own grief over his sick and dying son. As Catherine's present life intersects with Henry's past and as the automaton begins to take shape, Catherine confronts her grief as well as her future.

As much as I enjoyed this, Carey's portrayal of a grief-stricken woman didn't always feel believable. She cried a little too much, drank a little too much and generally seemed unhinged without enough of the backstory of her relationship with her lover to make her mad grief feel plausible. But it's easy to ignore those tear-filled scenes as the automaton comes together.

9. *The Master's Muse*, Varley O'Connor

Slate named *The Master's Muse* one of the "overlooked" books of 2012. Hopefully, the plug from *Slate* as well as several positive reviews will put *The Master's Muse* in the hands of more readers. O'Connor imagines the life of Tanaquil LeClercq, a ballerina who was choreographer George Balanchine's fifth wife and who contracted polio when she was at the top of her career.

Told from Tanny's point of view (some categorize this as a novel in memoir form, similar to *Loving Frank* or *The Paris Wife*), the story is about far more than the world of ballet in the 1950s and 60s, or one ballerina's rising and falling star. We enter into the complicated and puzzling relationship between Tanny and the mercurial, passionate and somewhat obsessive Balanchine. While Balanchine remains devoted to Tanny, their relationship is strained as Balanchine becomes obsessed with another ballerina. One feels the push and pull in the marriage as Tanny struggles to redefine herself as well as their relationship. I found myself wondering many times why Tanny loved Balanchine as she did, but then reminded myself that love and marriage are strange and inexplicable things. O'Connor handles this inexplicability and complexity with the same kind of powerful grace you'd expect to find in a prima ballerina.

This is also a story about the body and its connection to both mind and heart. Imagine being a dancer who makes a living through the use of your body and you're suddenly unable to dance or walk forever. The psychological hit must have been as devastating as the physical hit. Yet, Tanny rallies. This is not a dark

and dreary tale of medical maladies and woe – it's a tale of survival and reshaping one's identity after tragedy. More full disclosure: Varley is my thesis advisor and I respect the hell out of her writing and for what she has taught me about writing these last two years. Check Slate's overlooked list here: <http://tinyurl.com/cbcfxb6>

10. *What Happens Next*, Colleen Clayton

Again with the disclosure: I am so, so proud to call Colleen my friend and former classmate, and one hell of a writer! Colleen graduated from the NEOMFA and her first young adult novel was released shortly thereafter. Her debut novel takes on two incredibly tough subjects – rape and eating disorders. Colleen handles both with grace and humor.

Set in Lakewood, OH (that's near Cleveland, y'all), Cassidy "Sid" Murphy gets good grades, is on the cheerleading squad, and has been blessed (or cursed, as Sid believes) with a generous bra cup size. Things take a dark, horrendous turn for Sid on a school ski trip when she meets Dax Windsor. As readers, we know that no good will come from Sid sneaking away to meet up with Dax later that night. Thankfully, Colleen spares us a detailed rape scene. Sid doesn't remember exactly what happened that night. When she returns to school, her grades slip and she becomes obsessed with running. She finds solace in Corey, an A/V geek, who is dealing with his own issues. At first the enemy, Corey becomes Sid's greatest ally as she comes to terms with her body, her identity, and the rape.

Colleen excels at making her characters feel real. By the end of the book, Sid and Corey and all the rest are not just characters, they're the friends you know (or knew) in high school. And Colleen doesn't hold back or protect her characters. She puts them in a tough situation and raises the stakes in every chapter – which is exactly what all great writers do. Teenage girls will devour this novel even faster than I did. This book isn't on the list because I'm friends with Colleen; it's on here because it deserves to be read by young girls and women alike.

11. *Rabbit Hole*, A Play, David Lindsay-Abaire

We've all been down our personal rabbit holes before. The reasons vary but it's never a great place to be. In this particular Pulitzer Prize winning *Rabbit Hole*, it's the death of a child that sends Becca and four other characters spiraling. Four-year-old Danny has been struck by a car driven by 17-year-old Jason. Becca and Howie, lost in their grief, take separate paths toward acceptance. Becca refuses any counseling or therapy and refuses to talk about it while Howie attends grief therapy sessions and attempts to draw his wife out of her rabbit hole. Becca's quirky sister, Izzy, is pregnant, and Becca has to come to terms with the situation and her sister's non-plussed attitude about being a mother.

Like any good Shakespearean drama, all the characters get tangled up in each other's lives. Jason visits Howie and Becca searching for forgiveness. Howie and Becca, mired in grief, navigate their changing marriage. What saves this from being super somber is a ton of humor and a spark of hope running throughout the narrative.

12. *The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat*, Oliver Sacks

The mind and body are capable of extraordinary and magical things. They're also capable of playing some pretty strange tricks on us. Psychologist Oliver Sacks provides some of the strange tricks in readable stories that are less like scientific case studies and more like short stories. I read this for research purposes for my thesis but recommend it to anyone who enjoys playing armchair psychologist in real life.

13. Classic Pick for the Year: *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Zora Neale Hurston

One of Dave's colleagues mentioned that this was her all-time favorite novel which got me to thinking I hadn't read it since my second year of college when I took a Women's Literature class. Since that felt like ages ago, I pulled my old copy – complete with notes I'd made in the margins for my class – off the shelf.

Written in 1937 at the height of the Harlem Renaissance, Hurston battled with gender inequality in the literary world. While her male literary counterparts, Langston Hughes and Richard Wright, were making names for themselves, Hurston eventually retreated to Florida where she worked as a maid and her novels and essays fell into relative obscurity until Alice Walker and a few others renewed interest in Hurston's work. Now, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is considered one of the most important works of 20th century literature and African American literature.

The story follows Janie through the trials and tribulations of her three marriages and her life in the still racist South (in this case, Florida). Janie is an object of speculation and gossip when she returns to the fictional town of Eatonville. Neighbors wonder what has happened to her third husband, Tea Cake. Janie's friend Phoebe visits her and Janie relays the story as they sit on the porch. The story backtracks through Janie's early life and her tumultuous marriages to Mr. Killicks and Joe Starks. Joe eventually dies – I'm skipping a bunch of drama here – and Janie meets Tea Cake. They move to the Everglades and it's here that Janie is forced to make a difficult and deadly decision. I'll leave the summary at that so as not to spoil the story. Hurston wrote in African American dialect – something she was criticized for during the time but is now applauded for. It takes a chapter or two to get used to the rhythm, but once you do, you'll find yourself hypnotized by this story of one of literature's strongest and most spiritual women.