



Crossing the Creek: The Literary Friendship of Zora Neale Hurston and Marjorie Kinnan

Rawlings

Anna Lillios

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Two celebrated writers challenged by the color line

"In this fascinating and insightful book, Anna Lillios deepens our understanding of the complexity of the friendship between two of America's most beloved Southern female writers."--Virginia L. Moylan, author of *Zora Neale Hurston's Final Decade*

One of the twentieth century's most intriguing and complicated literary friendships was that between Zora Neale Hurston and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings. In death, their reputations have reversed, but in the early 1940s Rawlings had already achieved wild success with her best-selling and Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *The Yearling*, while Hurston had published *Their Eyes Were Watching God* to unfavorable critical reviews.

When they met, both were at the height of their literary powers. Hurston appears to have sought out Rawlings as a writer who could understand her talent and as a potential patron and champion. Rawlings did become an advocate for Hurston, and by all accounts a warm friendship developed between the two. Yet at every turn, Rawlings's own racism and the societal norms of the Jim Crow South loomed on the horizon, until her friendship with Hurston transformed Rawlings's views on the subject and made her an advocate for racial equality.

Anna Lillios's *Crossing the Creek* is the first book to examine the productive and complex relationship between these two major figures. Is there truth to the story that Hurston offered to work as Rawlings's maid? Why did Rawlings host a tea for Hurston in St. Augustine? In what ways did each write the friendship into their novels? Using interviews with individuals who knew both women, as well as incisive readings of surviving letters, Lillios examines these questions and many others in this remarkable book.

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