



# Reviewing the Reviews



## WORD CONNECTIONS

### Foreign Words

The word *facile* is from the French *facilis*, meaning “to do.” In French, the word means “easy to do.” In English, it has taken on the nuanced meaning of “superficial or shallow.” Notice the negative words in the same sentence: “but,” “cloaked,” and “dogged.” What is Wright’s purpose for juxtaposing these words to “facile” in one sentence?



## WORD CONNECTIONS

### Word Meanings

To be *chauvinistic* is to practice unreasonable devotion to one’s race, sex, etc., with contempt for others. It is derived from a French Napoleonic soldier, Nicolas Chauvin, notorious for his fanatical patriotism.

## GRAMMAR & USAGE

### Quoted Text

When you quote a critic, who then quotes a part of the text, you must use double quotation marks around the critic’s words and single quotation marks around the words of the text. Notice how Janie’s words are enclosed in single quotation marks.

## Book Review 2

“Miss Hurston can write; but her prose is cloaked in that facile sensuality that has dogged Negro expression since the days of Phyllis Wheatley. Her dialogue manages to catch the psychological movements of the Negro folk-mind in their pure simplicity, but that’s as far as it goes. Miss Hurston *voluntarily* continues in her novel the tradition which was forced upon the Negro in the theater, that is, the minstrel technique that makes the ‘white folks’ laugh. Her characters eat and laugh and cry and work and kill; they swing like a pendulum eternally in that safe and narrow orbit in which America likes to see the Negro live: between laughter and tears. [. . .]The sensory sweep of her novel carries no theme, no message, no thought. In the main, her novel is not addressed to the Negro, but to a white audience whose chauvinistic tastes she knows how to satisfy. She exploits the phase of Negro life which is “quaint,” the phase which evokes a piteous smile on the lips of the ‘superior’ race.”

(Richard Wright, “Between Laughter and Tears,” *New Masses*, 5 October 1937, p. 25)

## Book Review 3

“In a rich prose (which has, at the same time, a sort of nervous sensibility) she tells the tale of a girl who ‘wanted things sweet with mah marriage, lak when you sit under a pear tree and think.’ Janie did not get sweetness when her Grandma married her to Mister Killicks with his sixty acres of West Florida land, and his sagging belly, and his toenails that looked like mules’ feet; and she didn’t get it when she ran off with Joe Starks and got to be the Mayor’s wife, and sat on her own store porch. But when Tea Cake came along with his trampish clothes and his easy ways and his nice grin that made even a middle-aged woman like Janie sort of wishful the minute she sets eyes on him, he handed her the keys of the kingdom, and their life together (what there was of it) was rapture and fun and tenderness and understanding—the perfect relationship of man and woman, whether they be black or white.”

(Sheila Hibben, *The New York Herald Tribune Weekly Book Review*, September 26, 1937)

