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Porgy

Dubose Heyward

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Porgy

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Porgy by Dubose Heyward. Edwin DuBose Heyward (1885–1940) was an American author best known for his 1925 novel Porgy, which was adapted by his wife Dorothy into a 1927 play.

The stage Porgy inspired the 1935 opera Porgy and Bess with music by George Gershwin, which was later adapted into a 1959 film. Heyward also wrote poetry and other novels and plays, as well as the children's book The Country Bunny and the Little Gold Shoes (1939).

By 1924, Heyward had achieved a measure of financial independence, allowing him to give up business and devote himself full-time to literature. That year he published his first poetry collection, Jasbo Brown and Other Poems (1924). Between stints of writing, he supplemented his income by lecturing on southern literature at colleges and the Porter Military Academy.

Opening on Broadway in 1927, the non-musical play Porgy was a considerable success, more so than the Gershwin opera Porgy and Bess (1935) produced eight years later. The plot line of the opera follows the play almost exactly, while both differ greatly from the novel, particularly in the ending. Large sections of dialogue from the play were set to music for the recitatives in the opera.

Describing Heyward's achievement in Porgy, the African-American poet and playwright Langston Hughes said Heyward was one who saw "with his white eyes, wonderful, poetic qualities in the inhabitants of Catfish Row that makes them come alive." Heyward's biographer James M. Hutchisson characterizes Porgy as "the first major southern novel to portray blacks without condescension" and states that the libretto to Porgy and Bess was largely Heyward's work. Many critics have believed that Heyward was sympathetic in his portrayal of the Southern black. Others, however, have noted that the characters in Porgy, though viewed sympathetically, are still viewed for the most part as stereotypes.

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