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***Amiable with Big Teeth:* The Case of Claude McKay's Last Novel**

Jean-Christophe Cloutier

Put everything in it, yourself and everything else.
Max Eastman to Claude McKay

Ever since James Joyce's famous claim that *Ulysses* would "give a picture of Dublin so complete that if the city suddenly disappeared from the earth it could be reconstructed out of my book," modernism has been concerned with the recuperative preservation of experience.¹ Joyce's encyclopedic approach has enjoyed a wide influence, notably on the Jamaican-American poet Claude McKay, who stayed in Paris shortly after *Ulysses* was published in 1922.² In his autobiography, *A Long Way from Home* (1937), McKay acknowledges Joyce as "*le maître* among the moderns" yet considers *Ulysses* to be "greater as a textbook for modern writers than as a novel for the general public."³ In a letter to Max Eastman, McKay calls Joyce "a Don Quixote of contemporary literature," part of a few "crusading revolutionists against the dead weight of formal respectability under which modern literature is buried."⁴ McKay—who fought his fair share of windmills over the years—certainly had other modernist influences, but his privileged relation to *Ulysses* as a "textbook" manifests itself in McKay's novelistic attempts to maintain a similar Joycean archival fidelity. As his biographer Wayne Cooper has underscored, McKay's depiction of the *vieux port* in his second novel, *Banjo* (1929), "was thorough, unsparing, and accurate," and, in light of the Marseilles quarter's complete destruction during World War II, "McKay's description of its congested alleyways, dark habitations, seedy bars, and sinister denizens has become for some French a classic evocation of the quarter as

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558 it was between the wars.”⁵ Thus, the ability to “give a picture so complete” that the reader could “reconstruct” what has “disappeared” directly associates modernism with other forms of preservation, most notably the archive.

This holistic preservationist strain within modernism evinces an insatiable archival sensibility that seeks to accumulate, process, and conserve experience. Such an archival sensibility affected McKay’s writing career at the height of the Harlem Renaissance and continued to be a challenge for him as he set out to write what would turn out to be his last novel, the as yet unpublished and recently discovered *Amiable with Big Teeth*.⁶ The present article moves beyond the authentication process that was undertaken after its initial discovery to provide the first sustained literary reading of *Amiable*. I build on Marilyn Booth’s approach to nineteenth-century “fictional narrative as an alternative site of archival imagining” in order to read McKay’s twentieth-century novel as a work that is “disruptive of assumptions about material ‘truths,’” or what Ann Laura Stoler terms “epistemic uncertainties.”⁷ Stoler seeks to follow “the career of paper”—as Don DeLillo defines archives—from its inception up to the ossified grid of “major” history, paying close attention to the detours it has taken along the way.⁸ Although my work lies outside the strict context of colonial records that Stoler describes, I am similarly interested in following the vagabond itineraries of documents, in this case those McKay gathered and wielded for his own literary purposes.

“Because imagining what *might be* was as important as knowing what was” for McKay, he fashioned *Amiable* as a roman à clef, a genre dedicated to the embedding of sociohistorical facts but one that nevertheless resists the tyranny of “actual” history.⁹ Accordingly, I read “along the archival grain” only to better highlight the ways in which McKay crafts a “minor” history that runs *against* the grain as a means of disrupting the power dynamics threatening black autonomy. Ostensibly about the complex world-historical dynamics involved in the emergence of the “Aid-To-Ethiopia” organizations in Harlem during the Italo-Abyssinian crisis—which stimulated “new racial solidarity”—*Amiable* is McKay’s most realized literary expression of his desire for greater group unity among African Americans. McKay’s archival sensibility is shaped by his ideals of black self-reliance rather than by a strict adherence to historical truth. In this respect, the political, imaginative, and archival are, for him, intertwined.¹⁰

When McKay returned to the United States in 1934, after twelve years abroad in Germany, France, Spain, and North Africa, he confronted a changed nation that was just as broke as he was. He engaged in numerous writing projects, notably his memoir, *A Long Way from Home* (1937), and an unsparing work of nonfiction, *Harlem: Negro Metropolis* (1940). During this time, he also wrote essays for various publications including, among others, the *Nation*, *New Leader*, *Opportunity*, and *Amsterdam News*. He additionally tried to found a new magazine called *Bambara* and almost took over the editorship, with Countee Cullen, of the *African: A Journal of African Affairs*.¹¹ With the recent discovery of *Amiable with Big Teeth*, we now know he also wrote and completed a novel in this period, tapping into the same archive of events and facts that he used in his journalistic pieces. The novel irrevocably revises existing narratives of the evolution of the Harlem Renaissance and provides an occasion to reassess late

McKay's goals as a socially responsible novelist. Critical accounts of late McKay have largely concentrated on his fervent anticommunism, his Catholic turn, his queerness, or his inability to find a publisher for his Cycle poems. Encountering him through the archive reinforces the importance of the relation between archival and aesthetic practices in his oeuvre. McKay, having outgrown his status as "*enfant terrible* of the Negro Renaissance," turns to the novel form to reprocess the materials he gathered in writing his "party-bashing Baedeker *Harlem: Negro Metropolis*."¹² The resulting roman à clef underscores the singularity of his mature aesthetic principles and his trajectory as a transnational novelist.

McKay's literary imagining of the archive preserves a watershed moment in African American diasporic history in a way that a purely documentary account could not. Just as McKay had preserved Marseilles' *vieux port* in *Banjo* through accurate yet fictional depiction, in *Amiable with Big Teeth* he transports the reader back to a tumultuous time when Harlem's streets stirred with fervor for Ethiopia's cause. The novel becomes the final key to McKay's Joycean "reconstruction" of a lost time and place but also presents an ambivalent engagement with the necessary "fabrication" that fiction entails. As his final published writings, biography, research notes, correspondence, and work for the Federal Writers' Project (FWP) make clear, McKay was occupied—from the moment he set foot back in Harlem in 1934 until his passing in 1948—with a quest to foster "a group spirit and strong group organization" among African Americans (*A Long Way from Home*, 267). The uneven plot, factual inaccuracies, and forgeries of *Amiable* are guided by McKay's didactic motive to share his erudition, the unique perspective of his years abroad, and his experiences with the Comintern in a way that would empower his community. The joint failure of international communism and the rise of fascism in Europe now posed an immediate threat to what McKay considered an overly credulous African American minority lacking in leadership. By combining and falsifying characteristics of historical figures, fudging exact dates, playing with official documents, and manipulating other facts, McKay joins his playful archival sensibility to his late aesthetic principles. McKay further demonstrates how novels can outperform the archive's forensic task to tell "the story of a past event that remains otherwise unknown and unexplained."¹³ As a result, *Amiable* not only transports the reader back to a forgotten moment in time but also turns that literary world into the repository of the author's political ideals.

The Eye of a Poet and the Equipment of a Scholar

Claude McKay's *Amiable with Big Teeth: A Novel of the Love Affair Between the Communists and the Poor Black Sheep of Harlem* is a satiric yet sentimental novel of political intrigue, imposture, and romance.¹⁴ Given its unruly unfolding and large number of characters, the novel can be said to have a "plot" mostly insofar as it follows the secret plotting of the antagonist, Maxim Tasan, in his efforts to wrest Lij Tekla Alamaya, Ethiopia's official envoy, away from Pablo Peixota and Professor Koahzy's grass-roots organization Hands to Ethiopia. "Like a great army of crabs all crawling on the same

560 level," McKay writes, "there are many unusual personalities in Harlem" (102). Indeed, the story constellates a complex, international cast of such unusual players without ever leaving the streets of Harlem. Set in 1936, *Amiable* takes place during the turbulent months between Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia and the eruption of the Spanish Civil War, immersing the reader in the concerns, anxieties, hopes and dreams characterizing that moment when the "tides of Italy's war in Ethiopia had swept up out of Africa and across the Atlantic to beat against the shores of America and strangely to agitate the unheroic existence of Aframericans" (26).

The major historical events wedged between the Ethiopian crisis and the Spanish Civil War provide McKay with a rich background against which he can fictionalize his political agenda while reminding his audience of "the transnational contours of black expression between the world wars."¹⁵ When McKay returned from North Africa—five years after the market crash of 1929 and the so-called end of the Harlem Renaissance—he was bursting with potential writing projects but devoid of a source of steady income. Although the old circuits of Renaissance patronage more or less disappeared during the Depression, McKay was able, though not without difficulty, to produce major prose works throughout the 1930s. Like many other established and up-and-coming writers, McKay sought assistance from institutions that would prove instrumental to African American writing in years to come, namely the FWP, the Julius Rosenwald Fund, and the Guggenheim Foundation.¹⁶

In 1935, shortly after his plans for *Bambara* fell apart, McKay applied for a grant from the Julius Rosenwald Fund, explaining in his application that he "had originally planned a fictional version of his years abroad" but now felt that a straightforward autobiographical account would suffice.¹⁷ Yet he never really abandoned the idea of doing a novel: in his 1937 application for a Guggenheim fellowship, he explains that his scholarly work is too time consuming to let him "complete a new novel of the Negro section of Harlem." "I should like to give up to devote my time to a creative novel of Harlem life," he states, "but at present I am employed in research and rewriting on the Harlem section of the Federal Guide Book."¹⁸ To his recommender Lewis Gannet he confessed, "I crave to get away from the enervating atmosphere of the Federal Writers' Project . . . and plunge into" the new novel, though he did admit that it was largely thanks to his FWP work that he had already "piled up a lot of material for a new story."¹⁹ Although the particular novel he had in mind in 1937 was likely the unfinished *Harlem Glory*, this same research material would eventually make its way into the complete *Amiable*.²⁰ His agenda thus never deviated from the one he had outlined to Edwin R. Embree in his Rosenwald proposal: McKay wished to set down his "views as to what an intelligent American Negro may gain from travelling, how he may use his experiences in perspective to see and understand more clearly and broadly the social and cultural position of the American Negro and also in adjusting himself to American life."²¹ Although his autobiography and nonfiction do convey some of the richness of his experiences, *Amiable* stands as his most mature expression of this sentiment. After all, as Cooper asserts, McKay's "first objective had always been to experience life directly in order to communicate the truth of his experience in his art."²² Yet while he claimed

the artistic calling trumped any other—political or otherwise—his art nevertheless required tremendous amounts of research.

McKay is clear about his allegiance to the artistic over the political, explaining his position in *A Long Way from Home*: “In any work of art my natural reaction was more for its intrinsic beauty than for its social significance. . . . [M]y social sentiments were strong, definite and radical, but . . . I kept them separate from my esthetic emotions, for the two were different and should not be mixed up” (85; see also 111). Yet by the time he wrote *Amiable* in 1941, McKay seems to have forced his aesthetic hand to adopt a more “mixed” approach, even though he may have been reluctant to admit it. In a letter to Max Eastman discussing his progress on *Amiable*, McKay confesses that his arduous archival research has affected his novelistic practice:

I took your advice (half-way) and spent a month, not two, pottering with the plot, characters and aim of the novel. And it has worked out a little differently from the first draft I showed you. The main thing is that it has some politics in it and we had thought it expedient to keep politics out. But after building up the Lij into a really sympathetic character (albeit weak) and consulting notes and newspaper stories of the period (early 1936) in which the tale begins, I discovered that it was impossible to keep politics out, for the Aid to Ethiopia was the jumping-off of the Popular Front movement in the United States. Of course, I am keeping the political stuff in its proper place, so that it may not be a handicap to the straight tale.²³

While McKay may still feel that matters of “social significance” must be “kept separate from [his] esthetic emotions” rather than “mixed up,” this segregation, so to speak, of radical politics and aesthetic sense proves untenable in his late, post-FWP novelistic practice.²⁴ There is now a “proper place” for the “political stuff” in his fiction, an aesthetic potentiality awakened by his archival sensibility. In other words, by the time he was honing his novelistic skills with *Amiable*, the “distilled poetry of [his] experience” had become wedded to a form of literary archiving that served both his role as social activist and artist (*A Long Way from Home*, 70). But how had McKay’s archival work come to so powerfully alter his novelistic practice?

The truth is McKay had been consistently moving toward deploying his abilities as a creative writer in the service of his political convictions. McKay’s articles from the late 1930s and early 1940s—the period that informs both *Harlem* and *Amiable*—provide a glimpse into his evolving notions on this issue. In distancing himself from George S. Schuyler’s sloppy journalism, McKay declares, “I believe that the approach of the writer and artist to social problems is radically different from the approach of the politician,” a statement that nevertheless acknowledges that writers and artists *do* engage with social problems.²⁵ Two years later in the *New Leader*, McKay pithily encapsulates his new ideology: “When creative writers become politically-minded, they owe it to the public to dig down to the facts and interpret them.”²⁶ McKay feels this way because he believes that “the public expects more from [creative writers] than from ordinary politicians.”²⁷ McKay is hinting that a creative writer might represent an alternative or extra-ordinary kind of “politician.” Here, the freedom to have an independent politics is the province of the artist, but it is also what the creative writer “owes” to the reading public.

562 Historically, McKay had been careful about facts throughout his career, stressing the importance of firsthand experience in his reportage and documenting. It was his stint with the FWP, beginning in 1936, however, that allowed McKay to truly hone his research skills, a faculty he not only felt was necessary but also enjoyed. In a letter to Arthur Schomburg, McKay notes: "I am working all day every day," both at home and "at the big library digging things up."²⁸ And to Orrick Johns about a year later: "I like that research work, and I have been privileged to suggest the items I like to work on."²⁹ Crucially, McKay admits in *Harlem* that he "preferred" doing the "special research work" asked of the FWP Negro group "because the facts we unearthed were of intrinsic value to those of us who were writing about Negro life in our off-project time."³⁰ As a result of his diligent research, McKay became a fearsome investigative journalist, publishing incendiary articles and editorials in the late 1930s that laid the groundwork for what eventually became *Harlem*. He was proud of his archaeological excavations of facts—his ability to "dig down to the facts and interpret them"—even though he was forced to defend himself publicly when some of his anticommunist articles and those on the labor situation in Harlem began to be criticized by other black intellectuals.

Notably, both Adam Clayton Powell Jr. and George Schuyler attacked McKay for his article "Labor Steps Out in Harlem," published in the *Nation* in 1937.³¹ They claimed that he had either made up or exaggerated many of his statements and, in an echo of the criticism *Harlem* later received, they suggested that his plea for black autonomy was a form of segregation. In response, McKay composed two separate rejoinders in the *Amsterdam News* defending his status as an independent thinker based on the accuracy of his facts. Powell, he retorts, "marshals no facts to refute the statements contained in [my] article," and in his reply to Schuyler he underscores that "there has been no challenge of the facts marshalled in my article. I got them straight before I wrote."³² In fact, his reply to Schuyler contains a short-order archival tour de force; he shows off his research skills—itself a form of reprimand and victory over Schuyler the investigative journalist—by deciding "to consult the Schuyler dossier."³³ He reads all the pieces written by Schuyler in his regular column in the *Pittsburgh Courier* since the beginning of the decade and is "amazed to discover that almost every important point in my radio debate had been advocated much more forcibly by George Schuyler himself a few years ago."³⁴ McKay ultimately exposes how "Schuyler's inept attempt to slander [McKay] merely discredits himself," effectively turning Schuyler into the "falsifier of the truth."³⁵

While some reviewers of *Harlem* felt the book was not always objective, McKay declared it a pure "examination of the facts."³⁶ He received high praise for his abilities as a researcher from prominent figures, including Zora Neale Hurston, Grace Nail Johnson (James Weldon's widow), A. Philip Randolph, and none other than John Dewey, who called *Harlem* "a model for all studies of its kind," containing "enough detailed information presenting hard solid work to justify half a dozen Ph.D. degrees." In a statement that nicely encapsulates the essence of late McKay's archival aesthetic, Dewey concludes his letter by expressing how impressed he was with McKay's ability to combine "both the eye of a poet + the equipment of a scholar."³⁷ But McKay wasn't

after factual exactitude only in his journalistic articles or in *Harlem*; he was also diligent about accuracy in crafting *Amiable*. In the final months of writing the novel, McKay sent a letter to Simon Williamson, his former FWP colleague and reliable source for information on the Ethiopian situation, asking him to confirm “whether the Spanish Civil War broke in June or July of 1936.” “I want to dovetail the Fascist conquest of Ethiopia into it,” he explains, “but I need to be certain about the facts.”³⁸

This archival sensibility is intimately tied to McKay’s desire for greater group unity among Aframericans, as his wish to form an all-black Negro writers’ guild suggests. In his 1937 “Circular Letter for the Creation of a Negro Writers Guild,” McKay stresses the need for “Negro writers to draw closer together in mutual fellowship.” Such a group, McKay continues, “would be beneficial to all our writers and especially to those younger and potential ones who may look to the older for inspiration” and would allow Negro intellectuals to explore the “universal aspect of group culture.” In a striking comparison, he adds, “We think that it is possible to establish through intellectual fellowship something like a *living counterpart* of the unparalleled Schomburg collection of Negro books in the domain of scholarship.”³⁹ McKay’s wish, then, is that the guild be nothing less than a living archive.

But the guild quickly fell through due to too much in-fighting and, according to McKay, communist tampering. McKay’s stubborn claim to being, at bottom, an apolitical poet who had “nothing to give but my singing” was difficult for his critics to understand—or believe, which was not surprising, given that he constantly advocated “social consciousness,” “practical education,” and “group orientation” and attacked communists at every turn, only to then hide behind his role as “troubadour wanderer” (*A Long Way from Home*, 269–70). Alain Locke, who had been roundly mocked in McKay’s 1937 autobiography, harshly criticized McKay (at the behest of a young Richard Wright), accusing him of “spiritual truancy” and of being “caught in the ego-centric predicament of aesthetic vanity.”⁴⁰ Locke deplored what he perceived as McKay’s segregationist stance, the result of having “repudiated all possible loyalties,” which he asserted amounted “to self-imposed apostasy,” and naturally considered it hypocritical of McKay to advocate greater group unity among blacks while he himself remained notoriously independent, if not isolated.⁴¹ After years of vacillating between denying any political role for himself and engaging with the day’s most burning political issues in his many articles of the late 1930s—and still desperately trying to establish black fellowship—a defiant McKay decided to write, in 1940, the nonfictional *Harlem*, exposing, with facts and figures, the reality of black life as he saw it. Yet once McKay perceived the “conspiracy of silence” against *Harlem* in the press, he returned to his artistic calling in a last ditch effort to demonstrate how his dreams of strong black unity and leadership would work out in (fictional) practice, crafting a novel, *Amiable with Big Teeth*.⁴²

“Maybe it’s the great (Afro) American novel after all these years”

McKay takes any opportunity to insert history lessons into *Amiable*, ventriloquizing his views through its sympathetic characters, as the narrative tries to make sense of the

564 intense enthusiasm gripping Harlem in 1936.⁴³ Ethiopia had emerged “on the horizon as an embarrassing new Canaan,” igniting a “vague religious sentiment for Ethiopia” among Aframericans (27). It’s important to remember, that at the time, Ethiopia was only one of three independent black nations, along with Liberia and Haiti. Harlem had just suffered through a major riot, was plagued by unemployment, labor strikes, and occultists and mystics of all kinds, and was festering with a growing number of communists, all wanting their share of the Aframerican Harlemites. McKay’s novel is, at every turn, acutely aware of this troubled history, and it consistently reminds the reader of events that are now, for twenty-first-century audiences, sometimes obscure. What is perhaps most remarkable in McKay’s didactic countermeasures against the “credulity of the Aframerican masses” is the novel’s dedication to a multitude of transnational perspectives, combined with global historical knowledge (26). Clarifying the root causes of political conflict, exposing the real financial backers of various organizations—sometimes in order to cast them as villains or reveal them as quiet heroes—tracing the genealogy of certain movements, outing prominent figures like Father Divine as traitorous communists—these are among the main goals of McKay’s twin works of the early 1940s: *Harlem: Negro Metropolis* and *Amiable with Big Teeth*. While the former throws a lot of information at the reader, the latter, as literature, is concerned with how to put that knowledge into narrative form.

The novel contextualizes historical knowledge regarding important facets of African American life by creating correspondences between the local and the global. Notably, McKay uses the fictional club, the Airplane, to translate all sorts of African American trivia onto an international stage. In the Airplane Club, the owner Buster Quincy has hung a painting above the bar “of an airplane in the sky and a parachute jumper descending, who was caught up in a small tree” (75). Most people that came into the club, we are told, “thought that this picture was intended to represent the exploits of the notorious Aframerican Hubert Fauntleroy Julian, who had visited Ethiopia at the time of the coronation of Emperor Haile Selassie and by whom he was decorated and made a colonel of aviation” (75). There are many reasons to believe it might be Julian since the pilot *did* crash into a tree during this very same coronation ceremony.⁴⁴ But the painting’s artist claims that he was really thinking of Charles Lindbergh’s famous flight over the Atlantic. Quincy originally intended to call his club the Lindy Hop, but once he learned of Lindbergh’s racism, he changed his mind. Lindbergh’s reason for detesting Aframericans, we are told, is that “they had desecrated the sublimity of his glorious hop across the Atlantic by immortalizing it in a popular dance” (76). This episode is also noteworthy for reminding us that it was a black man who found the infamous Lindbergh baby’s decomposing corpse, a fact that apparently “incensed” Lindbergh. Through an anecdote about the evolution of a bar’s name and its mysterious painting, McKay inserts both the provenance of a popular dance and subsequently points away from the most famous white aviator of the time to showcase his black counterpart, Hubert Fauntleroy Julian, a man who actually fought alongside Ethiopians.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the epistemic uncertainty as to whether the painting depicts Lindbergh or Julian dramatizes the struggle for historical legibility and the recognition of Aframerican involvement in both local and world events.

It is in this same chapter, "The Tower and The Airplane," that McKay most explicitly expounds on his reasons why Aframericans should develop independent archival practices as a means of extricating themselves from communist and other disingenuous influences. A group made up of Tasan's communist lackey Newton Castle, the Ethiopian envoy Lij Tekla Alamaya, and their respective companions run into Professor Koazhy in the Airplane Club. Their "serious social discussions" over the merits and pitfalls of democracy is followed by a complementary discussion of art that celebrates education and reliable provenance in creating solid knowledge. Professor Koazhy is the undisguised mouthpiece for McKay's didactic wishes; from the very beginning, the character announces, "You must know the truth and Professor Koazhy is here to teach you" (9). Further, Koazhy is depicted as having the same desire for factual accuracy as McKay himself; when he is presented with the opportunity to meet a native Ethiopian in Alamaya, Koazhy asks whether the young man would be willing to authenticate some of the objects in his Ethiopian collection (87). Factual authentication is raised yet again by an extended observation about the Airplane Club's guest book, a document filled with a series of "exciting international signatures" (76). Around Harlem, the rumor is "many of the signatures in the Airplane's log book were fake" (77), and thus McKay presents the potential unreliability of archival records as an inherent threat to Harlem's claim to international reach. As a result, the evidentiary challenges surrounding authentication become a prime concern of the narrative.

Indeed, most major plot points in *Amiable* hinge on testing the authenticity of documents and people, on questioning and qualifying declarations of fact, from the truth behind Alamaya's stolen imperial letter signed by Emperor Selassie, to the exposure of "Ethiopian princess" Benebe Zarihana as a fraud. The opening scene of the novel stages an example of this kind of revision by pitting varying levels and sources of knowledge against one another, culminating in the professor's lesson. At the rally welcoming Lij Alamaya to Harlem, Koazhy explains to the crowd that he is wearing the uniform of an Ethiopian warrior, and implores them to understand the significance of having an official "prince of Africa" like Alamaya in their midst. He underscores the importance of knowing the "real Ethiopia" in order to help her properly and corrects some of the misconceptions that have already been uttered: "I have just heard these learned speakers inform you that the kings of Ethiopia are descended from Solomon. I am sorry to correct them, but that is not true, my friends. The dynasty of Ethiopia is older than Solomon; it is older than the Bible" (9). He then turns to Alamaya and apologizes, for "even the Ethiopians themselves today do not know their great history" (9). Koazhy concludes: "What you all should know is also what the Ethiopians should know about themselves" (10); in other words, he implores the peoples of African descent to unite through collective knowledge of their mutual provenance. Thus, Koazhy's lesson is not simply directed at the Harlem congregation (or the novel's potential readers) but also at the young Ethiopian who suddenly finds himself in America learning about his homeland. This encounter with an educated Aframerican so "extraordinarily well-informed" has a deep impact on Alamaya, who reflects that Koazhy had made "authoritative and profound statements about Ethiopia of which, he, the lij himself, was ignorant" (13). Alamaya emerges from the event feeling "that it was incumbent upon him to open his

566 mind to more extensive study" (13). The novel is bookended by such a lesson, concluding as it does with the suggestion that detailed knowledge of African lore ultimately proves to be a matter of life and death. Maxim Tasan's ignorance of the ritual of the Leopard Men prevents him from realizing that the white feather attached to his costume designates him as the blood sacrifice victim. McKay thus positions archival practice as an imperative—"dig down to the facts and interpret them"—"for group survival" (which was the title of one of McKay's articles of the day).⁴⁶ The protective function of the archive is thereby made manifest, as it was during McKay's debate over facts with Powell and Schuyler, a move that further suggests the archive's multivalent status as a means of preservation.

The interplay between divergent political perspectives and levels of knowledge are juxtaposed with similar clashes at the cultural level, often when each side exposes his ignorance of the other. In one scene, Seraphine Peixota admiringly comments on the "lovely wine color" of Lij Alamaya's pajamas and asks if they were made in Addis Ababa. In a humorously orientalist exchange, the Ethiopian replies, "No, they are your father's" (28). But the lessons learned are not always comic. For instance, Alamaya doesn't understand the American concept of "passing" and is upset when Seraphine tells him they are light-skinned enough to pass successfully. Rather than apprehending passing as one of the tactics used by some ethnic Americans to navigate social constraints, the African's perspective exposes the irrationality and inequality enveloping America. In McKay's novelistic scheme, Alamaya's inability to "understand the American point of view," as Seraphine puts it, is precisely why his presence as Ethiopian can become a source of pride and hope for Aframericans (191). For Bunchetta Facey—Seraphine's intellectual friend—Alamaya represents the "human point of view," and as such it is "more important than the American point of view" (191). Bunchetta pushes her transnational thought further, lamenting the blinders of nationalistic perspective per se: "It is the American point of view, the German point of view, the British point of view and all the different nations' point of view that makes a mess of the world" (191).

One of the novel's richest transnational didactic scenes is the party held in honor of Lij Alamaya, gathering as it does a wide array of foreign nationals in the same room. Among them is a thoughtless white Britisher named Aubrey Pickett—friend to the novel's chief antagonist, Maxim Tasan. Pickett accuses Alamaya of suffering from "C.P.T." because Alamaya arrives at the party only at midnight: "I see, already you are keeping C.P.T. . . . Well, it wouldn't be unexpected in an African" (40). Alamaya has no idea what C.P.T. stands for, but neither do two of the black Harlemites present. Pickett is forced to explain the term himself and does so "with an amused expression as if he were imparting some special knowledge of Aframerican similarity to Africa: 'C.P.T. is Colored People's Time, of course, because as they say, 'Colored people are always late'" (40). Alamaya is "surprised and nettled by the stress Pickett put on 'Colored,'" as he "had not been long enough in America to think in terms of being 'colored.'" Since Alamaya thinks of himself as "an Ethiopian, and African," as opposed to "colored," he is here receiving an American lesson he did not wish to learn, and one that points to the systemic oppression suffered by the Aframerican minority (40). The Ethiopian's

reply not only positions his African perspective as an advantage, but demonstrates his superior historical knowledge: “Perhaps *colored* people are never early, because they can afford to be late. They have nothing in the world to hurry about. But you English have everything. Yet you were late in Asia in 1931, you were late in Africa in 1935 and perhaps you will soon be late in Europe and in Britain itself” (40). In a brilliant move, Alamaya takes Pickett’s racist stereotype of ethnic time and, through the invocation of historical facts, turns it into a critique of the British Empire’s poor timing. Japan seized Manchuria from China in 1931, while 1935 saw Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia. Composing this scene in 1941 but setting it in 1936, McKay has the luxury of knowing the development of events leading into World War II and can thus give his Ethiopian envoy what seems like perspicacious wisdom and clairvoyance.

Pickett is saved from further embarrassment by the arrival of Seraphine and Bunchetta. The girls proceed to theorize about which part of the diaspora their bodies most correspond to, Bunchetta insisting that she “could pass for a typical Ethiopian girl.” Seraphine embarrassingly reminds her that since she is already “passing as a Balinese in the village,” Bunchetta wants “to be everything” (42). Pressed to weigh in, the lone African in the room says Ethiopia boasts “various types [of women], just like in Harlem,” but that another girl present at the party, Gloria Kendall, “could be a typical Ethiopian girl” (42).⁴⁷ This moment, unbeknownst to the reader, plants the seed of a later chicanery perpetrated by Tasan—present during this conversation—in which Kendall will be turned into the fake Ethiopian princess Benebe Zarihana. Indeed, Tasan also absconds with Alamaya’s precious official letter during this party in order to later discredit Peixota’s organization’s status as “officially” representing the interests of Ethiopia. Once the public learns that Alamaya does not possess any documentary proof backing up his status as Ethiopian emissary, Tasan is able to coerce him into acting as “interpreter” to the fake Princess Benebe in return for continued, Comintern-funded financial assistance. The narrative, however, only provides conclusive evidence of this scheme once Seraphine stumbles on Tasan’s secret archive.

In the wake of Ethiopia’s defeat and having been tricked into marrying a moronic white party member named “Dandy” Nordling (as part of Tasan’s ongoing efforts to humiliate her stepfather, Pablo), Seraphine Peixota finally begins to grow suspicious of Tasan. Left alone at his apartment and having fortuitously come into possession of Tasan’s lost set of keys, Seraphine digs around until she eventually finds and unlocks Tasan’s secret chest. Inside she finds “a large thick envelope marked ‘Ethiopia’” containing “half a dozen photographs of Princess Benebe in different costumes and poses and four of Gloria Kendall” (242). Seraphine immediately realizes that Benebe and Kendall are the same person; hard to believe such “an elaborate trick,” she thinks, “but the evidence was right there” (242). Digging some more, Seraphine finds Alamaya’s stolen letter and comprehends that she and the young Ethiopian, along with all of Harlem, have been the “victim[s] of a vile frame-up” (242). In having Seraphine finally take control over her own life at this juncture in the novel, McKay suggestively ties agency to archival practice. The degrees of factual deceit the communists have perpetrated are here exposed through Seraphine’s unearthing of archival evidence.

568 Alamaya's imperial letter, however, proves problematic as an authentic document. Though the narrative had made the letter seem "the most authentic thing of all," it turns out it was not altogether "genuine," in Alamaya's words (291). The letter is a remnant of the pan-African movement, written at the height of the Harlem Renaissance when the government of Ethiopia was convinced by "prominent Africans, Haitians, Cubans, Aframericans and others" of the importance of "sending a mission" to America (291). The patriotic Alamaya eventually got hold of the letter meant for "one of the originally designated members of the postponed mission" and, since "so few people can read the official Amharic language of Ethiopia," figured it might still work twelve years after it had been issued. But he also knew, just as Maxim Tasan knew, that "it couldn't stand close scrutiny" (291). In other words, the fight waged over Harlem's "poor black sheep" hinges on the close scrutiny of archival documents and the realization that these are always vulnerable to exploitation (126). Both the predatory communist and the heroic Ethiopian resort to a degree of archival deception, but both are exposed when one follows McKay's archival practice of digging deep.

Roman à Clef: Opening McKay's Secret Archive

Tasan and Alamaya aren't the only ones who have been deceitful; McKay is the one who has been fabricating the facts. In real life, the man who presented a fake Ethiopian princess to the Harlem world was not a Comintern secret agent but rather a former baseball star turned PR man named Chappy Gardner. Gardner, "the black PT Barnum," was also an original member of McKay's Negro Writers' Guild, working as an arts critic for the *Pittsburgh Courier* (fig. 1).⁴⁸ The writers of the FWP composed a few portraits of Gardner and traced the arrival, as well as subsequent exposure, of a "Princess Tamanya" in the local newspapers.⁴⁹ In the FWP's *Almanac for New Yorkers 1938*, the entry for July 20 reads "Harlemites chuckled this day in 1935 when it was learned that Chappy Gardner, Negro press-agent, had hoaxed the entire metropolitan press with his story of an 'Ethiopian Princess.'"⁵⁰ The fact that McKay makes this hoax the handiwork of a communist secret agent is a testament to both his paranoid suspicion of the Popular Front and his indictment of those African Americans who abuse their own people's "gullibility" for their own financial and petty gain.

Just as McKay transposes what he sees as the deplorable acts of some Aframericans onto guilty white (red) hands, he also idealizes and synthesizes the qualities he admires in creating his novel's heroes. Lij Tekla Alamaya is a composite character that seems largely based on McKay's friend, Dr. Malaku Bayen, an Ethiopian emissary who was director of the Harlem United Aid to Ethiopia organization.⁵¹ The character of Professor Koazhy is likely a hybrid of Dr. Willis N. Huggins and Charles C. Seifert. Huggins, discussed in *Harlem*, was a notable yet controversial African American historian and public intellectual "who opposed the Communists in the Aid-to-Ethiopia Campaign."⁵² Charles C. Seifert was a collector of African memorabilia, historian, and local mentor to young intellectuals and also founded the Ethiopian School of Research History, where he housed his large collection, just as the fictional Professor Koazhy does in the novel.

Fig. 1. "Negro Writers Guild of New York City in Conference during Strike May 25, 1937. l. to r. Chappy Gardner, Ted Yates, Floyd Snelson, Wilford Bain." Inscription on the back written by Claude McKay. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of the Literary Representative for the Works of Claude McKay, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

The respect "Professor" Seifert enjoyed can be seen in Elmer Wendell Dean's declaration, in his wonderfully strange story *An Elephant Lives in Harlem*, that Seifert is "the greatest thinker of our times."⁵³ Yet McKay did not seem to share young Dean's high regard of Seifert; allowed to stay in his apartment in return for "doing part-time work writing history to prove that African blacks were the founders of civilization," McKay deplored how "the old fool" was "always butting in on me with senile talk about ancient African glory."⁵⁴ In *Amiable*, however, Professor Koazhy is portrayed entirely positively and turns out to be the secret hero of the entire tale. His underground league of Senegambians is an example of "behind-the-scenes" group unity working for the welfare of the Aframerican community. Through such literary reimagining of the archive, McKay is showing what his political and cultural ideals would look like in practice.

Alongside Koazhy and the Sufi Abdul Hamid—who needs no embellishment and appears as himself in the novel—the Honduras-born Pablo Peixota is another of McKay's ideal manifestations of a mature Harlem leader.⁵⁵ Peixota is partly a fanciful version of Caspar Holstein, the reformed gangster fondly represented in *Harlem*, and partly an evolution of McKay's own protagonists from previous novels. Peixota stands as McKay's answer to critics who accuse him of only giving debased and depraved portraits of the African American "underworld." Like Holstein, Peixota has risen from a past in the numbers game to become a respected community leader and philanthropist in middle age; as such, Peixota is a recasting of the vibrant and rugged truant criminal featured

570 in *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* as a mature and wise family man. In Peixota, McKay synthesizes the qualities he most admires and desires in black leadership: streetwise flair, philanthropic generosity, internationally informed political savvy, an anticommunist stance, and pro-black self-reliance. As the Haitian Ray unites himself with Jake Brown and Banjo in McKay's 1920s novels, so the Ethiopian Alamaya ends *Amiable* by taking a job under Peixota's wing. The partnering up between a reformed American gangster and a homeless African intellectual is indicative of McKay's evolution as a politicized novelist, a development also manifested in the character of Dorsey Flagg. The misunderstood Flagg is notably Peixota's closest acolyte and just happens to be the character closest to McKay himself. Through Flagg, McKay erects his defense as an independent intellectual and clarifies his position in relation to communism and the racial aesthetics inherited from the Harlem Renaissance.

In "Art and Race," a standout chapter that demonstrates how the core debates of the Harlem Renaissance were still very much in play a decade later, Flagg further ventriloquizes McKay's mature stance on racial aesthetics. At an exhibition honoring the work of the Aframerican artist Dixon Davis "Dèdè" Lee, the renowned white art critic Magnus Chetwind praises Lee's animalistic caricatures for possessing a "profound social significance," declaring that Lee's "miracle of achievement" captures "the hidden qualities, the unknown soul of a people" (262).⁵⁶ Hearing this, the irate Flagg cannot resist voicing his disagreement even though he had not planned to speak. The spread of fascism in Europe, Flagg stresses, affects not only "the social and political status" of minorities but also "their special artistic and literary contributions" (265). "Against the threat of Nazism," Flagg goes on, "all minority groups in this country are taking stock of themselves," and Aframericans represent "the largest minority and the greatest problem to the American nation" (265–66). In the midst of this highly charged global context, Flagg warns, Dèdè Lee's drawings "are held up to national opprobrium by a member of their own group." Flagg "cannot agree with Mr. Chetwind that these graphic delineations of certain Aframerican types represent the soul of my people" (267), and his own interpretation of Lee's figures recalls the criticism McKay's early novels received, especially in the black press:

They represent the extreme of depravity, imbecility and criminality. I cannot say they are immoral, for to be moral or immoral one must be human. But these Aframerican types are all inhuman. Look at them again and see as I see: colored persons snarling like hounds, posed like baboons in the chain gang, working like zombies in the cotton field, crazy with unreasonable anger. . . . [Y]ou expect my people to accept this distorted exhibition of their race as human. We will not accept it. If we do, then Hitler is right when he says in *Mein Kampf* that Negroes are half-apes. . . . Praise the work of Mr. Lee for its power, its originality and artistry. But do not try to convince us that of such is the black man's soul. (267–68)

Just as he had explained in his letter to Eastman, McKay discovers in 1941 that the consulting of "notes and newspaper stories of the period" makes it "impossible to keep politics out" of an aesthetic project that addresses "minority problems." Flagg is here making the exact same point by invoking the recent rise of fascism in Europe as the

main reason behind his objections to the wide appraisal of Lee's monstrous representations of Aframericans.

The black press had criticized McKay's early novels for their animalistic portraits of certain black types and for their "treatment of lower-class black life as a slanderous attempt to glorify the lowest class of Negro life."⁵⁷ This point of contention among black intellectuals and artists, Tyrone Tillery underscores, "struck at the heart of one of the fundamental themes of the Renaissance: the relationship between art and society, and most particularly at the problem of defining a writer's obligation—if any—to society."⁵⁸ In *Amiable*, McKay once again engages that debate, though this time he makes a radically different contribution. The added qualification by Flagg that Lee's work should still be praised for "its power, its originality and artistry" suggests that McKay is not apologizing for his earlier works; he still believes in total artistic freedom. Flagg's improvised speech on racial art, then, is the strange fruit of the politicization of McKay's own mutable aesthetic at this late stage in his novelistic career.

Conclusion

McKay's unpublished essay "Group Life and Literature," written toward the end of his stint in the FWP, can guide us through this morass of literature's relation to minority group life, politics, and society. Here, McKay reaffirms his belief that writers who primarily treat questions of prejudice, disenfranchisement, discrimination, and segregation are only creating a "literature of protest" and that "such subjects are not suitable for literary treatment." "Colored writers should bear in mind," he adds, "that despite demarcations and barriers their group life is not a gesture of eternal protest. Our life follows the common pattern, even like that of other groups or nations of people who have existed under oppression, such as: the Irish, Greeks, Jews, Indians, Chinese." McKay proceeds to group different creative writers according to basic novelistic genres, differentiating between whites and blacks. When McKay comes to the "field of the lower depths of rural and urban life," he names Zola and Gorky as European exemplars and himself as the only "colored" writer "truly representative of this field. My novels, *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* belong to it." Interestingly, McKay ends by calling for black writers to take up the "minor field" of "the historical romance," announcing that "our group has need of a great novelist in the historical field. A novelist who could depict the enthralling romance of the lives of the towering figures of the colored world."⁵⁹ The essay concludes with a list of such historical figures, followed by an enigmatic "(to be continued)." Although *Amiable with Big Teeth* is not a typical example of historical fiction—it chooses the immediate past as its historical context rather than a *longue durée* throwback—as a roman à clef it employs the same archival tactics, using real people and historical facts to weave a dramatic tale. In that sense, McKay did follow through on his handwritten "(to be continued)" when he depicted "the enthralling romance of the lives of the towering figures of the colored world" of 1936 Harlem with *Amiable* and tried his hand at becoming the novelist he felt his group so sorely needed.⁶⁰

572 So what had happened to Claude McKay? What had life, communist hyenas, and his archival practices wrought on the beleaguered novelist? If we think back to the Joycean declaration that opens this article, the Harlem we could rebuild out of the protean blueprints of McKay's oeuvre would be both real and counterfactual. Yet in this instance, the term *counterfactual* seems too strong; a more appropriate term would be *counterarchival*. Despite McKay's investment in factual accuracy, he litters his novel with forgeries: when the official letter of the Lij proves to be a fake, we are reminded that archival material also depends on narrative; that without narrativization, the archive is nothing more than "the sweet equality that reigns in an enormous common grave," as Milan Kundera calls the "archive's ideal."⁶¹ Alamaya's belated use of the imperial letter is guided by his own sense of morality regarding group unity and, similarly, McKay's literary archival deceit is differentiated from Tasan's political archival deceit. Instead of detailing a series of actual leadership tragedies—by 1941, Huggins, Bayen, and Sufi Abdul Hamid were dead, Holstein was just out of jail, and Siefert was sort of a crank—McKay's revisionist history puts a positive, empowering spin on facts.

As McKay himself observed in his working notes for *Harlem*, "Behind the headlines lies the real throbbing life of Harlem."⁶² By ultimately redeploying his carefully compiled records in the service of an alternative history—thus "against the grain"—McKay's novel provides the necessary narrative to make a new, recuperative diasporic archive meaningful. As Marilyn Booth suggests in another context, this kind of archival historical fiction maps "an alternative route to present and future possibility."⁶³ McKay's roman à clef presents the fictional trials and tribulations of private lives as metonyms for urgent historical concerns, and thus literature, true to itself, becomes the archive's "living counterpart."⁶⁴ By giving living form to the events of 1936 in his novel, McKay approaches the archival as a state of hibernation in an Ellisonian sense, as a "covert preparation for a more overt action," and thus fashions his novel, like his FWP colleague Ralph Ellison, "as a raft of hope."⁶⁵ The nonfictional *Harlem* could only go so far in fulfilling McKay's vision; without a novelization, the intensity of forces, the human interplay, the savory characters, would be lost to history, relegated to the "unprocessed" archive.

For McKay, the archive is not solely a positivist repository of *facts* that then become history, but rather a source of *clues* that can position the reader in an empowered relation to past and future, lending itself to aesthetic interpretation. I have in mind here the sense that Franco Moretti gives to clues in his *Signs Taken for Wonders*, where he argues that "*clues* are not *facts*, but rather rhetorical figures; clues represent a moment of multiple possibilities of signification and semantic ambiguity."⁶⁶ In this way, the literary metamorphosis of facts into clues points to an archival morality that shows factual evidence to always be manipulated, made malleable by poetic and deceitful political hands, and that takes "advantage of the novel's capacity for telling the truth while actually telling a 'lie.'"⁶⁷ It is in this sense that McKay's archival aesthetic is a hidden ethic, a responsibility he feels toward his readers. In reconstituting, reactivating, reclassifying and rewriting his own vagabond archive, McKay appropriates for himself, and in the service of his community, the strategies usually reserved for institutional or imperial governance. Ultimately, McKay suggests that to treat documents with

unflinching hardness devoid of creative narrativization is to approach the world with a fundamentally subjugated mindset. We can thus read the archival practices that led to the crafting of *Amiable* as a schooling in what we can do with facts, a didactic impetus that has always been latent in McKay.

For all these reasons, and more, it is truly tragic that *Amiable* was not published the year it was written—1941, just a year after Richard Wright's *Native Son*—as it might have solidified McKay's status as one of the foremost black prose writers of his day and clarified his dedication to his own group. McKay's colleague Simon Williamson shared these high hopes for *Amiable*, telling McKay that it will come “at an opportune time of social change, development and disillusion of the Negro,” and that thanks to his novel, Negroes “will be in a better position to form a practical alliance for group survival and cultural and economic development.”⁶⁸ With the belated discovery of *Amiable with Big Teeth*, it seems that the archive can now begin to give back what McKay wanted it to provide all those years ago.

Notes

1. The epigraph to this article comes from a letter from Max Eastman to McKay, April 20, 1941, box 3, folder 69, Claude McKay Collection, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT. Eastman is writing about McKay's progress on *Amiable with Big Teeth*.

2. James Joyce, quoted in Frank Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of “Ulysses”* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 69.

3. Claude McKay, *A Long Way from Home* (1937; rpt., New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 190. Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number.

4. Claude McKay to Max Eastman, April 25, 1932, in Claude McKay, *The Passion of Claude McKay: Selected Poetry and Prose, 1912–1948*, ed. Wayne F. Cooper (New York: Schocken, 1973), 151.

5. Wayne F. Cooper, *Claude McKay: Rebel Sojourner in the Harlem Renaissance, a Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 255. See also Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 189.

6. In 2009 I discovered the complete typescript of *Amiable with Big Teeth*, including corrections in McKay's hand, in the Samuel Roth Papers at Columbia University's Rare Book and Manuscript Library. The novel has since been successfully authenticated, and a scholarly edition is forthcoming in 2014. The bound typescript's unexpected location in the papers of Samuel Roth, the man who was accused of “pirating” Joyce's *Ulysses* in the late 1920s in his *Two Worlds* journal, suggestively links McKay's fate to that of Joycean modernism.

7. Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 1. Marilyn Booth uses the phrase “disruptive of assumptions about material ‘truths’” in explaining the agenda behind Zaynab Fawwaz's nineteenth-century historical fiction in her essay “Fiction's Imaginative Archive and the Newspaper's Local Scandals: The Case of Nineteenth-Century Egypt,” in *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*, ed. Antoinette Burton (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 275, 277.

8. Don DeLillo, *Libra* (1988; rpt., New York: Penguin, 2006), 15.

9. Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 21, emphasis in original.

10. *Negroes of New York (An Informal Social History)*, chapter 19, “I, Too, Sing America,” reel 4, Writers' Program, New York City: Negroes of New York Collection, 1936–1941, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

11. On *Bambara*, see "Ways and Means Committee for a New Negro Magazine," box 4, folder 108, Claude McKay Collection. McKay and Cullen wanted to change the subtitle of *The African* from "A Journal of African Affairs" to "A Journal of Literary and Social Progress" and hoped it would become "an organ of group culture." The May–June 1938 issue announced their subsequent editorship of the journal, but the venture never took place. See Claude McKay to James Weldon Johnson, 22 April 1938, James Weldon Johnson and Grace Nail Johnson Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

12. Alain Locke, "Spiritual Truancy," *New Challenge* 2, no. 2 (1937): 84; William J. Maxwell, *New Negro, Old Left: African-American Writing and Communism Between the Wars* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 3.

13. Ronald R. Thomas, *Detective Fiction and the Rise of Forensic Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 4.

14. *Amiable with Big Teeth*, unpublished typescript from 1941, box 29, folders 7–8, Samuel Roth Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York, NY. The page numbers of the typescript of *Amiable with Big Teeth* are used in this article and are hereafter cited parenthetically.

15. Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*, 3.

16. For more on this, see Lawrence P. Jackson's *The Indignant Generation: A Narrative History of African American Writers and Critics, 1934–1960* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011). Jackson traces African American writing following the "formal end of the Harlem Renaissance" as a continuous evolution, not as a radical break, and underscores the emergence of new funding sources (18).

17. Cooper, *Claude McKay*, 307.

18. "Plan of Work," Guggenheim Application, September 9, 1937, box 4, folder 115, Claude McKay Collection.

19. Claude McKay to Lewis Gannett, September 18, 1937, ms. Am 1888–Am 1888.4, Lewis Gannett Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

20. Some McKay scholars have suggested that *Harlem Glory*, an incomplete "novel" published posthumously in 1990, was written while McKay was working on *Harlem*, because it contains thinly veiled portraits of Father Divine and Sufi Abdul Hamid, both of whom feature prominently in *Harlem*. See Carl Cowl's preface to Claude McKay, *Harlem Glory: A Fragment of Aframerican Life* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1990). However, letters in McKay's papers to his then agent Laurence Roberts attest that *Harlem Glory* was written in or around 1936–37, not later.

21. Claude McKay to Edwin R. Embree, April 30, 1935, Julius Rosenwald Fund Archives, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.

22. Cooper, *Claude McKay*, 317.

23. Claude McKay to Max Eastman, March 29, 1941, McKay Papers, Lilly Library Manuscript Collections, Indiana University, Bloomington.

24. See, for instance, McKay's notebook in box 11, folder 338, Claude McKay Collection. It is filled with dates, names, quotes, and other factual details of subjects discussed throughout *Harlem* such as Marcus Garvey, Father Divine, Faithful Mary, Sufi Abdul Hamid, Willis Huggins, Caspar Holstein, Jews, communists, and Ethiopia. A listing of the titles of the subject files series in his papers at the Beinecke also shows the range of his research notes and interests. See drs.library.yale.edu:8083/HLTransformer/HLTransServlet?style=yul.ead2002.xhtml.xsl&pid=beinecke:mckay&query=claud%20mckay&clear-stylesheet-cache=yes&chlon=yes&big=&adv=&filter=&hitPageStart=1&sortFields=&view=c01_4#SIV.

25. "McKay Says Schuyler is Writing Nonsense," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 20, 1937, 12, rpt. in McKay, *Passion of Claude McKay*, 256.

26. "Where the News Ends," *New Leader* (New York, NY), June 10, 1939, 8, rpt. in McKay, *Passion of Claude McKay*, 231.

27. "Where the News Ends," 231–32.

28. Claude McKay to Arthur Schomburg, August 20, 1935, quoted in Cooper, *Claude McKay*, 313.

29. Claude McKay to Orrick Johns, September 11, 1936, quoted in Cooper, *Claude McKay*, 314.

30. Claude McKay, *Harlem: Negro Metropolis* (1940; rpt., New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), 240.

31. McKay, "Labor Steps out in Harlem," *Nation*, October 16, 1937, 399–402, rpt. in McKay, *Passion of Claude McKay*, 243–49.
32. "Claude McKay Versus Powell," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 6, 1937, 4, rpt. in McKay, *Passion of Claude McKay*, 250; "McKay Says Schuyler is Writing Nonsense," 253.
33. "McKay Says Schuyler is Writing Nonsense," 255.
34. "McKay Says Schuyler is Writing Nonsense," 255.
35. "McKay Says Schuyler is Writing Nonsense," 256, 257.
36. McKay, *Harlem*, 199.
37. John Dewey to Claude McKay, November 29, 1940, box 2, folder 61, Claude McKay Collection.
38. Claude McKay to Simon Williamson, May 29, 1941, Claude McKay Papers (Additions), box 1, folder 2, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York, NY. For those wondering, it was July 1936. McKay's reliance on Williamson for factual exactitude is reminiscent of Joyce's own repeated requests to his "Dear Aunt Josephine" for various details about Dublin while writing *Ulysses*.
39. Claude McKay, "Circular Letter for the Creation of a Negro Writers' Guild," October 23, 1937, box 4, folder 108, Claude McKay Collection, rpt. in McKay, *Passion of Claude McKay*, 233, emphasis added.
40. Locke, "Spiritual Truancy," 84. See Cooper, *Claude McKay*, 319–20. As Lawrence Jackson explains, "Wright hoped to see McKay's body of work overturned. He desired a complete repudiation of the Harlem Renaissance" and privately asked Locke to review McKay's autobiography (*Indignant Generation*, 75).
41. Locke, "Spiritual Truancy," 84.
42. Claude McKay to Edward Embree, November 16, 1940, Julius Rosenwald Fund Archives.
43. The subhead to this section comes from a letter from Max Eastman to Claude McKay, April 20, 1941, box 3, folder 69, Claude McKay Collection.
44. See David Shaftel's "The Black Eagle of Harlem: The Truth behind the Tall Tales of Hubert Fauntleroy Julian," *Air and Space Magazine*, January 1, 2009, airspacemag.com/history-of-flight/The-Black-Eagle-of-Harlem.html.
45. While Lindbergh was known as "the lone eagle," Julian was often called "the black eagle." Julian is featured among the many "portraits" gathered by FWP writers in the Writers' Program, New York City: Negroes of New York Collection, 1936–1941.
46. "For Group Survival," *Jewish Frontier* 4 (October 1937): 19–26, rpt. in McKay, *Passion of Claude McKay*, 234–39.
47. Four photographs by Martin and Marvin Smith, gathered under the caption "Types of Harlem Women," appear in McKay's *Harlem* (176).
48. Sadie Hall, "Chappy Gardner," reel 1, Writers' Program, New York City: Negroes of New York Collection, 1936–1941. The photo can be found in "Negro Writers Guild," May 25, 1937, box 18, folder 579, Claude McKay Collection.
49. See reels 1 and 2, Writers' Program, New York City: Negroes of New York Collection, 1936–1941. Even though she was ousted as a fraud, "Princess Tamanya" nevertheless went on tour giving concerts across the country between 1935 and 1940. See "Tamanya Appears with Italian Group," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 23, 1940, 11.
50. FWP, *Almanac for New Yorkers 1938* (New York: Modern Age Books, 1937). Sadie Hall and Larry Jordan are those who composed portraits of Chappy for the FWP.
51. McKay praises Bayen in *Harlem*, mentions that he is "recently deceased" (he died in 1940), and includes a 1937 photo of him, in which he is accompanied by another Ethiopian named Lij Araya Abebe (176). The Harlem United Aid to Ethiopia later became the Ethiopia World Federation.
52. McKay, *Harlem*, 189. The communists circulated propaganda against Huggins—an example of which appears in *Harlem*—and the good doctor's body was found on July 5, 1941, after he had been missing for six months. It was declared a suicide, but most suspected foul play; this scandal took place while McKay was writing *Amiable*. For more on Huggins, see www.thefreelibrary.com/Willis+Nathaniel+Huggins+%281886-1941%29%3A+historian,+activist,+and...-a0148463511.
53. Elmer Wendell Dean, *An Elephant Lives in Harlem* (New York: Ethiopic Press, n.d.), dedication page.

54. Claude McKay to Max Eastman, August 24, 1934, in McKay, *Passion of Claude McKay*, 199.

55. Sufi Abdul Hamid—born Eugene Brown—was a labor organizer. He was profiled by the FWP, and McKay wrote of him often and fondly in his articles from the 1930s and 1940s, dedicating the final chapter of *Harlem* to him (181–262). The sufi died tragically in 1938.

56. Although Lee is a fictional character, McKay was well versed in the work of most of Harlem's artists of the day. He lived in the same building as Romare Bearden and Jacob Lawrence in the late 1930s and undertook extensive research on Negro artists in New York for the FWP. His FWP report profiles the following artists: William Ernest Braxton, Melvin Gray Johnson, Albert Alexander Smith, Charles H. Alston, Henry W. Bannarn, Richmond Barthé, Sara Murrell, Romare Bearden, E. Simms Campbell, Aaron Douglas, Beauford Delaney, Richard Bruce Nugent, Robert Savon Pious, Earle Wilton Richardson, and Augusta Savage. See reel 1, Writers' Program, New York City: Negroes of New York Collection, 1936–1941.

57. Tyrone Tillery, *Claude McKay: A Black Poet's Struggle for Identity* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 87.

58. Tillery, *Claude McKay*, 87.

59. McKay, "Group Life and Literature," box 9, folder 287, Claude McKay Collection.

60. McKay, "Group Life and Literature."

61. Milan Kundera, *The Curtain: An Essay in Seven Parts* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 97.

62. Claude McKay, notebook, box 11, folder 338, Claude McKay Collection.

63. Booth, "Fiction's Imaginative Archive," 278.

64. McKay, "Circular Letter for the Creation of a Negro Writers' Guild."

65. Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952, rpt., New York: Vintage, 1995), 13; Ralph Ellison, introduction (1981) to Ellison, *Invisible Man*, xx.

66. Joseph Jonghyun Jeon, "Memories of Memories: Historicity, Nostalgia, and Archive in Bong Joon-ho's *Memories of Murder*," *Cinema Journal* 51, no. 1 (2011): 76, emphasis in original. See also Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders: On the Sociology of Literary Forms* (New York: Verso, 1983), 145–46, and Carlo Ginzburg's eloquent history of clues in "Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm," in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, trans. John Tedeschi and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 96–125.

67. Ellison, introduction, xxii.

68. Simon Williamson to Claude McKay, June 1, 1941, Claude McKay Papers (Additions), box 1, folder 2.