A crucial literary dialogue of the 1920s that has gone all but unnoticed\textsuperscript{1} occurs in an exchange between American expatriate writer Ernest Hemingway’s novel of white bohemians, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), and Harlem Renaissance author Claude McKay’s novel of black proletarians, *Home to Harlem* (1928).\textsuperscript{2} The substance of this intertextual mano a mano, however, is not a clear-cut matter of a prior publication shaping a subsequent text, a major novel influencing a minor one. Indeed, unraveling the knotty liaison between the two novels obliges us to rethink a few principles of modernist literary studies. While *Home to Harlem* radically rewrites Hemingway’s tropes of race and nation, McKay’s ransacking of *The Sun Also Rises* effectively enables the “New Negro” author to bring into being his own creation. Even more crucial, however, the occasion of literary borrowing isn’t unilateral, and an identification of this bilateral literary exchange adds another dimension both to McKay’s transgressive revisioning as well as to Hemingway’s modernist original. The evidence for the bilateral character of the exchange may be observed by historicizing the black and white intertextual tango of the 1920s. Embodied in such verse as “On a Primitive Canoe,” collected in the black poet’s celebrated omnibus *Harlem Shadows* (1922, 36), McKay’s early to mid-twenties poetry radically transformed the language of modernism. By subjecting the modernist aestheticizing of the primitive to the ideological conditions of early twentieth-century America, McKay’s
writing relentlessly interrogates the discursive stability of primitivism. It is crucial to recall that *The Sun Also Rises* exhibits the influence and anxiety of another poem published in 1922, T. S. Eliot’s high modernist elegy for classicism, *The Waste Land.* Eliot’s impact is important to keep in mind because McKay’s verse played a parallel, if decidedly subversive, role in determining the conditions for Hemingway’s novel by establishing the vernacular of *low* modernism. Without the revolutionary imagination of the Harlem Renaissance, and specifically without McKay’s lyrical capsizing of the modern-primitive binary, Hemingway would have been unable to conceive the modern primitives who people his novel. On the one hand, Hemingway’s narrative of white modern expatriates entitled McKay to envision his black transnational, transgressive innovation. On the other hand, McKay’s radical anastrophe enabled Hemingway to envisage the instability of the binary: modern-primitive. My objective is to observe how these doubling, mirroring narratives form a vivid, bilateral intertext of the interwar period. The implications that inhere in the exchange, furthermore, are critical for modernist literary studies and questions of canon formation. My broader aim is to set into motion a revisioning of the interaction between black transnational and modernist transatlantic studies—a reassessment that emerges from this account of the intimate conversation between *Home to Harlem* and *The Sun Also Rises.*

While scholars have overlooked McKay’s high regard for Hemingway’s literary art, they have noted his esteem for another white author’s work, clearly present in *Home to Harlem.* A would-be writer himself, the principal character Ray “had read, fascinated, all that D. H. Lawrence published. And wondered if there was not a great Lawrence reservoir of words too terrifying for nice printing” (227). Nine years later, unmediated by fictional narrative, McKay would directly reaffirm his regard for Lawrence. In his 1937 autobiography, *A Long Way From Home,* McKay articulates his preference for Lawrence’s fiction over writings by the avant-garde literary moderns. For McKay Lawrence is “more modern than . . . Joyce” because in Lawrence’s writing the black author “found confusion—all of the ferment and torment and turmoil, the hesitation and hate and alarm, the sexual inquietude and the incertitude of this age, and the psychic and romantic groping for a way out” (247). As critics have noted, the effect of Lawrence on McKay’s work is visible in McKay’s strategic adaptation of Lawrence’s focus on the instinctual (Cooper 1987, xiii), the Laurentian notion of “blood-knowledge.” But in the same chapter that singles out Lawrence as an influence on his writing, McKay “confess[es]” his “vast admiration” for Hemingway (McKay 1937, 249–50). Where he speaks
of Lawrence as suggesting to him in a general way the valuing of primitive sensation as the subject matter of his writing, he expatiates for several more pages than he devotes to Lawrence on Hemingway’s impact on his understanding of the modern existential condition: “[Hemingway] has most excellently quickened and enlarged my experience of social life” (252). McKay cites The Sun Also Rises as the source text, and to accentuate his debt appropriates the white author’s world heavyweight champion rhetoric: “When Hemingway wrote The Sun Also Rises, he shot a fist in the face of the false romantic-realisists and said: ‘You can’t fake about life like that’” (251). McKay’s appropriation of the earlier novel is motivated fundamentally by his intense admiration for it.

Notwithstanding his avowed enthusiasm for the white author’s materials, comprehending McKay’s use of Hemingway necessitates grasping, somewhat counterintuitively, how the black author demonstrates a subtle ambivalence about the white. In A Long Way From Home McKay recounts that Max Eastman introduced him to Hemingway during a time when the black Atlantic author was also a resident of the Left Bank (249). McKay marks this meeting as significant in the same section of his memoir in which he makes it clear that, while living as an émigré in Paris, he did not share the experiences of the “white expatriates,” who are described as “radicals, esthetes, painters and writers, pseudo-artists, bohemian tourists” (243). Exercising the language of leftist dissident culture, McKay locates himself on the outer edge of the Left Bank, a radical black position that permits him to observe with detachment: “I was a kind of sympathetic fellow-traveler in the expatriate caravan. . . . Their problems were not exactly my problems. They were all-white with problems in white which were rather different from problems in black” (243). However, McKay did not put Hemingway in the company of the “pseudo-artists” and “bohemian tourists”; the author of The Sun Also Rises evidently is the exception to McKay’s dismissive depiction of the majority of white expatriates. Nonetheless, Hemingway does fit to some degree in McKay’s taxonomy, as he is one of the “white expatriates” and “writers,” and certainly one can see from McKay’s position that Hemingway’s are “problems in white.” In another section of his 1937 autobiography, McKay mocks Hemingway, if in singularly veiled terms. In a Marseilles African bar, McKay engages in a conversation with a Senegalese acquaintance about taking a holiday, and when the African expresses a preference for Paris, McKay, the Jamaican exile, clearly interprets such a longing as colonial mimicry. As a black outsider who disapproves of bohemian, self-absorbed, white expatriate Latin Quarter café society, McKay replies
witheringly: “I said I didn’t feel attracted to Paris, but to Africa. As I wasn’t big and white enough to go on a big game hunt, I might go on a little one-man search party” to Africa (McKay 1937, 295). In 1929, while living in Paris, McKay visited Morocco. In 1930 he left Paris behind and returned to Morocco, where he remained for the better part of three years. In his memoir he refutes the notion that the peoples of North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa originate from racially distinct genealogies, thus rejecting the idea that he never made it to genuinely black Africa: “divided into jealous cutthroat groups, the Europeans have used their science to make such fine distinctions among people that it is hard to ascertain . . . when a Negro is really a Negro. I found more than three-quarters of Marrakesh Negroid” (304). Like Hemingway, McKay is “attracted” to Africa, but as he is a black diaspora cruiser, the appeal lies in the opportunity to make a spiritual quest, a search for home, as in the titles of his first novel and autobiography—a voyage within as well as a journey without maps, not a “big game hunt.” McKay moreover titled his second and last memoir My Green Hills of Jamaica (written in 1946–47 and published posthumously in 1979), performing on the title of Hemingway’s 1935 travelogue, Green Hills of Africa. As the Jamaican author could claim his Caribbean home—and as a black diaspora author, he could lay claim to Africa in a way that Hemingway could not—the title demonstrates a complex disposition with respect to Hemingway’s influence virtually until the end of his life. McKay’s writing carries a complicated ambivalence about the white author’s entitlement to claim difference.

McKay’s most vivid citation of Hemingway, however, saturates his first novel, a rewriting of the white author’s art for black transnational purpose. While critics have broadly overlooked The Sun Also Rises–Home to Harlem intertext, they have noted McKay’s exploitation of and interaction with other texts. John Trombold examines another of McKay’s borrowings, Home to Harlem’s recycling of Dos Passos’s newsreel-like novel Manhattan Transfer (1925). However, the critical neglect of the Hemingway-McKay interchange is not due to the critical recognition of the influence on McKay of Dos Passos’s novel. The reason the parallels between McKay’s and Hemingway’s texts have been obscured rests in the lingering identification of Home to Harlem with Carl Van Vechten’s Nigger Heaven (1926). In reading McKay’s novel during the interwar period through Van Vechten’s, black critics contended that New Negro writers, particularly those with “Nordic” patrons, risked white appropriation. W. E. B. Du Bois’s well-known and influential writing off of Home to Harlem, published in the Crisis, proceeds from the idea that McKay is cashing in
on the exploitation of black primitivism, the sort of deed that Van Vechten's unwisely titled novel epitomized for black reviewers. The accusation against McKay was partly an opposition to a black writer who is reproducing racist stereotypes, an even worse transgression than Van Vechten's appropriation of black life. During the 1920s, black critics encouraged black writers to produce literature of the “Talented Tenth,” as in The Souls of Black Folk (1903) Du Bois designated the 10 percent of African American society who made up the professional striving class. Whites had generated enough depictions of blacks as indolent and ignorant, so it was time for more positive images. Moreover, if the renaissance was going to improve the grim condition of the vast majority of black people in American society—among the often-stated intentions of the New Negro movement—then the art it produced should elevate rather than denigrate Negroes. Indeed, even at present the idea that a canonical white writer, perhaps especially Hemingway, inspired a key text by a prominent black author challenges fundamental principles in black literary and cultural studies. However, without a comprehension of how McKay and Hemingway engaged in a literary interchange, an understanding of the revolutionary text Home to Harlem is incomplete.

Du Bois’s denunciation of McKay’s first novel was fundamentally a deep reaction against what the black bourgeoisie saw as the “low-down” character of Home to Harlem; in other words, the valuing of the primal—most notorious being sexual difference—in the narrative as a means toward black social revolution. This aspect of Du Bois’s reaction to McKay’s novel uncovers an additional motivation for the black press’s condemnation of Home to Harlem. Du Bois’s censure was a reaction against the contagious trend among modernist authors toward generating texts that portrayed the postwar devotion to creature pleasure, embodied by the writing of such Greenwich Village sexually renegade authors as Edna St. Vincent Millay and Djuna Barnes, and translated for the mainstream by Hemingway’s 1920s writing. Du Bois advocated a black social protest literature that promoted African American struggle and was therefore anxious in thinking that modernist subcultural literature would contaminate second-generation New Negro writing. Du Bois’s apprehension was focused not only on the bohemian modernist tendency to promote an antirealist, or Gothic, aesthetic and therefore apparent rejection of political principles, but, along with its lack of interest in politics, Du Bois resisted its concentration on sensuality. He regarded McKay’s act of mimicking sexually explicit subcultural modernist literature especially upsetting because the author of the inspiring sonnet of black struggle, “If We Must Die”
(1919), was influential among second-generation New Negro writers like Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, and Wallace Thurman. Du Bois’s concerns were well founded. Although Hemingway is habitually identified as the personification of masculinist, homosocial literary art, *Home to Harlem* draws on *The Sun Also Rises* by plundering Hemingway’s blurring of sexual and gender identity boundaries, as a number of Hemingway scholars have discussed, the white author’s deconstruction of sex/gender codes as natural. This includes Brett Ashley’s androgyny and expropriation of masculine traits, Robert Cohn’s empty masculinism, Pedro Romero’s obsolete machismo, and the novel’s thoughtful comment on Jake Barnes’s lack of an identifiably heterosexual relationship signaling the distressing possibility of homosexuality. *Home to Harlem*’s wide array of queer characters, from marginal “pansies” to the primary character Ray, may outstrip Hemingway’s *racy* novel, but their very advent validates the existence of *The Sun Also Rises*. The act of appropriating and inverting Hemingway’s stimulating bohemian novel of existential hopelessness ultimately makes it possible for McKay to overturn the race hierarchy built into the white modernist blackface minstrel literary act, revolutionizing the modern novel by seizing the stage without makeup. His literary act attempts to perform the authenticity of the New Negro by presenting a complex black co-protagonist, Ray, a queer black anarchist whose “dream” is to write the novel the reader is reading.

It is instructive that Van Vechten was during the 1920s another well-known white nonconformist author, as both *Nigger Heaven* and *The Sun Also Rises* appeared two years before *Home to Harlem*. However, the cozy parallels between Hemingway’s hit and McKay’s bestseller are much more tangible than the intimate relations *Home to Harlem* arguably shared with Van Vechten’s effort. It is useful once again to bring in Dos Passos’s text, as McKay may have had in mind one of *Manhattan Transfer*’s peripheral characters, Congo Jake, when he named his own principal character. But again the correspondences between Hemingway’s and McKay’s primary characters are more conspicuous. Indeed, one may perceive in the correlations and distinctions between Jake of *The Sun Also Rises* and Jake of *Home to Harlem* that the parallels between the two novels are considerably more substantial and, I contend, more significant for modernist literary studies than those between Dos Passos and McKay. Beginning with the act of naming itself, the surnames of both Jakes, designations of their be-ingness, reverberate meaningfully with the other. That is, both reveal something essential about the pair of Jakes: the Midwestern white expat Jake Barnes in Hemingway’s novel, the Southern migrant man of color
Jake Brown in McKay’s. Indeed, a comprehensive appreciation for the metonymic value of their surnames becomes apparent only when the two Jakes are positioned side by side. Both protagonists shipped out to Europe to fight in the Great War, moreover, underscoring the historical importance of their roles as early twentieth-century males. Identifying McKay’s borrowing of Hemingway’s naming in *Home to Harlem* permits an understanding of the compound inverted doubling within the nucleus of the two texts.

Even the distinctions between the two novels generate a form of intertextuality. Hemingway’s novel depicts the experiences of bourgeois Anglo American and British expatriates who feel morally bereft and psychologically devitalized following the momentous, intense, and therefore self-defining experience of war. Its characters survive at the exhausted, closing stages of a history reduced to rubble. Jake Barnes’s war wound leaving him sexually impotent reflects Western male, modern dissipation: the dispossess of access to species regeneration as well as spiritual renewal. In effect *The Sun Also Rises* puts into novelistic form the historical atrophy portrayed in *The Waste Land*, while on another level parodying the fretful revelation of Eliot’s desert of the real, the troubling triumph of the modern world, and subsequent near obliteration of the ancient, traditional, and classical. McKay’s novel also contains a character who suffers from modernist angst, the deracinated Haitian immigrant Ray, though his anguish stems from a dramatically different crisis. In 1915 the United States invaded Haiti, and the violent occupation lasted nineteen years. In *Home to Harlem*, marines have murdered Ray’s brother and imprisoned his father for resisting American imperialism. Mimicking the *agon* of whiteness, Ray is “conscious of being black and impotent” (154). As Fanon says in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), this double incapacitation is a political condition. Paradoxically the anxiety, due to the infection of the modern disorder, according to McKay’s controversial strategic primitivism, also signifies Ray’s powerlessness to make contact with the instinc- tual, the essence of his blackness. Ray’s anguish simultaneously resides in his closetedness, his incapacity to express frankly, even and especially to himself, his own sexual difference. The denial of this elemental, “blood” knowledge is swathed in his inability to embrace entirely his own negri- tude. The cultivation of the intellect, the act of becoming civilized, results in the annihilation of the primal desire and essential nature of the human body.

With the exception of the intellectually smothered and ambivalent Ray, however, *Home to Harlem*’s black proletarian characters are nearly
impervious to modernist angst. Their daily lives are absorbed in an emancipated, distinctly un-Victorian, Laurentian devotion to Eros. To be sure, both novels chronicle the social revolution of the interwar period, the Jazz Age, an investment in a decidedly Dionysian zeal for daily existence. However, in contrast with Jake Barnes’s sexual and modernist impotence, Jake Brown’s lusty appetite for copious sexual activity figures as the antithesis of teleological modernist disintegration—of Hemingway’s winner take nada. For McKay the condition of being a constituent of the black proletariat and the inevitability of the struggle against racism and imperialism ironically provide the means for dodging the bullets of modernist impotence and its inexorable consequence, masculine incapacitation. As McKay’s 1921 sonnet “America” articulates, race struggle ironically vitalizes the New Negro. America “feeds” the New Negro figure “the bread of bitterness, . . . Stealing [his] breath of life,” yet “Her vigor flows like tides into [his] blood,” America paradoxically “Giving [him] strength . . . against her hate” (*Harlem Shadows* 1922, 6). Jake Brown deserts the European war because institutionalized racist policy prevented him from participating in the fighting. As desertion from the racist American military is, also ironically, an act of agency in *Home to Harlem*, one may note a dramatic contrast with Barnes’s emasculating war wound. The signs of history and ideology are scored on the bodies of the two protagonists in radically different typographies.

A crucial signifier in both novels is not merely the substantial presence of race, but also the specter of its evil twin, nation. During the 1920s, Anglo American expatriate intellectuals like Hemingway and Gertrude Stein, who urged her young apprentice to visit Spain, romantically thought of pagan Spain as a savage, blood-obsessed society, comparatively untouched by the modern affliction. Spain was the site of the linguistic, national, cultural, and even the racial Other, and the ritual of the *corrida* (bullfight festival), a stubborn survivor of pre-Christian custom, observably manifested that culture’s primeval purity. The uncontaminated moment in *The Sun Also Rises* is the San Fermín bullfighting *feria* in Iruña, or Pamplona, with its testosterone-discharging *encierro*, set in the denationalized, borderland Basque region of Navarra. The fiesta is depicted as a magnificent debauch and engagement with death, and therefore an opportunity for the vital retrieval of the almost totally vanished instinctual urge. The wine-soaked Lost Generation of *The Sun Also Rises* must seek out in a foreign location moments of authentic, ritualistic, primitive, Saturnalian stimulation. This stimulus acts as a pungent tonic against the festering consequences of modernist, bourgeois capitalist alienation:
the estrangement from true sensation and a recoverable origin. In order to experience authentic sensation the constituents of Hemingway’s Lost Generation must relocate themselves among the foreign Other. Only in an alien land, beyond the reach of the modern world, may they recover genuine primal feeling; this sought alienation is formalized by the novel’s cross-genre fertilization, its borrowing from travelogue literature. The travel narrative acting as underpinning for novelistic form signifies the modernist act of reviving the narrative of exploration for the Western subject’s tourism, in the manner of Gauguin, located among the savage Other. In the primordial Pamplona bullfight festival, active incessantly with the visceral diversions of the feria, Barnes is free of modernist uncertainty; he is living his dreams, the grotesque carnival supplying the waking life stage for his unconscious.

In civilized Paris, insecurities plagued Jake Barnes’s sleepless nights. Despite the nonconformist bohemian atmosphere, bourgeois socialization represses vital feelings; that is to say, even the Left Bank bohemians function according to a rigorous system of socially acceptable behavior. But after he crosses the border into Spain on his fishing trip, Barnes sleeps soundly and does not dream. Barnes does not sleep much during the fiesta, but his wakefulness is not due to insomnia. At the end of the fiesta, when his idol, Lady Brett, becomes the lover of the young torero Pedro Romero, Jake experiences the festival’s paradoxically “wonderful nightmare,” wake-dreaming his necessary encounter with “hell” while under the effects of the third perilous absinthe, the liqueur that Oscar Wilde cautioned against. Prevented from entering the dream world of unconscious desire while in orderly, bourgeois France, Jake Barnes enters the surreal world, the intense trancelike experience: the blurred borderland of the Bacchanalian Basque festival. After the fiesta, in the novel’s—and Jake’s own—unraveling, left to his own devices as he convalesces at a beach resort in San Sebastian, he is renewed, his mind clear of obsessive feelings for Brett. But his well-being is only temporary. When Brett cables him for help, he reenters the nightmare, the hell of desire. The novel’s final question is really a rhetorical response to Brett’s assumption that a narrative has come to an end. “Isn’t it pretty to think so?” exposes the provisional condition of any finality that isn’t death, nada. According to Hemingway’s Bakhtinian dialogical vision, the Basque carnival puts in motion the vital and necessarily fleeting Dionysian release of ekstasis, occasioning the performative encounter—as in the authentic, immediate experience of war—with death. An engagement with mortality is the essential experience before reentering the civilized field of the modern,
where rapture and violence must be kept in check, institutionalized, manufactured according to the needs of the global capital order. Such are the ephemeral effects, the existential hangover, of authentic experience.

Though explorers themselves, Great Migration travelers, *Home to Harlem*’s characters, conversely, are the visited exotics from the point of view of the white majority. Basque and black are skin-close, as these two novels converge. Inhabiting the alien site, the urban jungle of Harlem, African Americans are visited by whites hunting for a bargain-priced thrill among the racial Other. It is imperative that *Home to Harlem* is a picaresque rather than a travel narrative. For alienated Anglo moderns, the sun (only) rises in foreign lands. For McKay’s black folk, however, home as nocturnal Harlem signifies the voyage toward realizing genuine feeling among one’s own kind, even while existing in the diaspora. This is true even though the black migrant cruiser is classed by the dominant social and political order, and in a way seen even by himself or herself, as an alien. Each of McKay’s Southern migrants is a double refugee in his or her own nation: both uprooted from the Southland as well as diaspora exile, estranged from African origin. The African American immigrant is banished, if blissfully, to the comparatively safe harbor, Harlem, New Negro Mecca of the black Atlantic.

Through an understanding of their tangled intertextuality, one may see how the two novels collectively form their companion-volume performance of modernism and primitivism. An American in Paris, Jacob Barnes carries his Midwest identity as a geographical signifier, a regional index. Harlem-located Jake Brown, however, wears his racial identity on his skin, a sign of racial difference that by design places the Jake Browns of the world in a position of existential hardship that the Jake Barneses cannot dream of. In a world split between black skin and carte blanche, just being jake isn’t enough both to play it straight as well as to parody wasteland dissolution. Where Jake Barnes must seek out a primitive experience in a foreign, savage locale, prefiguring the safari trope of Hemingway’s later writing, Jake Brown is designated as savage and primitive by racist, supremacist society. Replying radically to the assumed racist superiority written into the anxiety of influence, McKay’s strategic mimicry engages trenchantly with Hemingway’s carnivalesque, claiming agency from the perspective of the essentialized authentic primitive.

McKay’s is not, however, the only novel of the two peopled by New Negro characters. The two black characters who emerge in *The Sun Also Rises* generate a kind of raced intensity in Hemingway’s narrative. The first appears in the form of the racist caricature of the black drummer who
plays for Brett Ashley and her bal musette crowd, Hemingway’s literary performance acting as a form of Jazz Age minstrelsy, the drummer’s identity conveyed by the economical, Conradian “all teeth and lips”:

Inside Zelli’s it was crowded, smoky, and noisy. The music hit you when you went in. Brett and I [Jake Barnes] danced. It was so crowded we could barely move. The nigger drummer waved at Brett. We were caught in the jam, dancing in one place in front of him.

“Heahre you?”

“Great.”

“Thaats good.”

He was all teeth and lips.

“He’s a great friend of mine,” Brett said. “Damn good drummer.”

(62)

Brett’s affirmation of their friendship signals the blurriness of her own boundaries. As a woman, she is closer to the primal nature of the black percussionist—being a drummer, the player of the sacred musical instrument, summons seminal images of primeval Africa. Pursuing freely her own sexual desire also puts Lady Brett in a location where she may more intimately touch the world of the black drummer. Indeed, the most dangerous part of Hemingway’s narrative is the lingering question of whether the consummate nonconformist Bret Ashley and the musician have had a sexual encounter. Her later unabashed pursuit of the Spanish bullfighter, an embodiment of pre-Christian and therefore primal essence, spells out the threat of miscegenation. Practically the same percussionist shows up in *Home to Harlem*, perhaps before he made his way across the black Atlantic to the Latin Quarter watering hole of Lady Brett and her retinue. In *Home to Harlem* McKay converts Hemingway’s *bal nègre* musician from a blackface minstrel, performed like a string-puppet by a white literary master, into a Harlem luminary with an impish agency: “What a place Conner’s was from 1914 to 1916 . . . ! And the little ebony drummer, . . . beloved of every cabaret lover in Harlem, was a fiend for rattling a drum!” (28).

The second New Negro character in Hemingway’s novel is chapter 8’s “noble-looking nigger.” A modernist farce on Rousseau’s noble savage, Hemingway’s caricature is a linguistically unstable, incongruous figuration—a travesty of Du Bois’s idea of double consciousness—one “n” word gainsaying the other. Indeed, the hyphenated “noble-looking nigger” operates as a lowercasing and therefore deflating of the entitling
n-doubling designation “New Negro.” Yet it is the very racist signifier itself in Hemingway’s narrative, attached to the incongruous modifier “noble-looking,” that points to the advent of the new and therefore suggests the potential for the exposure of racial supremacy. The black boxer, who reminds Bill Gorton of “Tiger Flowers, only four times as big,” is chased out of Vienna. Bill’s journalistic report is a portent of the arrival of fascism in central Europe, if a recognizably American form of right-wing policing of minority cultural work: the lynch mob. Fittingly, the writer’s patchy, drunken discourse, suggesting the stimulus of Manhattan Transfer’s newsreel prose, evokes headlines: “Injustice everywhere. Promoter claimed nigger promised let local boy stay. Claimed nigger violated contract. Can’t knock out Vienna boy in Vienna” (71). When the black fighter is quoted, his speech is deferential: “‘My God, Mister Gorton,’ said nigger, ‘I didn’t do nothing in there for forty minutes but try and let him stay. That white boy musta ruptured himself swinging at me. I never did hit him’” (71). When McKay analyzed the cultural meaning of “Negroes in Sports” in The Negroes in America (1923), he focused on the prizefighter Jack Johnson (1878–1946). Much more than the denoted Tiger Flowers (1895–1927), who won the world middleweight title in the same year that Hemingway’s novel appeared, and who was known as a respectful, religious, and thus nonthreatening black male, Hemingway’s boxer, though courteous, suggests the racially embattled heavyweight, Johnson, in that the fictional black fighter must flee racist aggression and, though deferential, will not apologize for summarily flattening his Aryan opponent. Hemingway is evoking a familiar internationally known black icon to fashion a curious literary irony, the demolisher of the white supremacist “hope.”

A black boxer does appear in McKay’s writing. When he sets off for Barcelona accompanied by a “Senegalese boxer, who had a bout there,” in A Long Way From Home, McKay’s description of the events that took place iterates the prose of Death in the Afternoon (1932), the Spaniards faring far better than the Austrians:

The magnificent spectacle of the sporting spirit of the Spaniards captured my senses and made me an aficionado of Spain. I had never been among white people who gave such a splendid impression of sporting impartiality, and with such grand gestures. Whether it was boxing between a white and black or a duel between man and beast in the arena, . . . the Spaniards’ main interest lay in the technical excellencies of the sport and the best opponent winning. (295–96)
The portrait in *A Long Way From Home* of the Senegalese pugilist in Barcelona, in its figurative blending of boxing with bullfighting, indicates McKay’s evident deference to the contradiction of the noble negritude fighter in *The Sun Also Rises*.

The use of the word “nigger” to describe a character portrayed sympathetically may be understood in terms of Hemingway’s post–Great War distrust of civilization and its consequent denial of access, outside of ruinous war, to the primal. The term “nigger” has detached itself from the ignoble, according to Hemingway’s narrative. Operating under the influence of intellectuals like Dos Passos, whose *Manhattan Transfer* portrays the Great War as global capitalism’s industrialization of warfare, the exploited worker engineered into the soldier, the slave of capitalist, imperialist, nationalist appetite, Hemingway exposed twentieth-century warfare as the most devastating expression of modernization, beginning with *The Sun Also Rises* and carried through by *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). Immanent in this representation of soldier as slave is the predicament of the raced subject living under the authority of nationalist ideology. Indeed, the text’s use of the racist signifier ironically communicates a crucial component of the inverted language of negritude, a philosophy that McKay played an essential role in articulating. The doctrine of negritude is founded on the conviction that civilization is death and that a resistance to being civilized may lead to an authentic evolution. It is in this facet of Hemingway’s text that one may distinguish best McKay’s role in the conception of *The Sun Also Rises*. All linguistic constructions, including the speech acts of nation—and the partner of nationalism, race—are untrustworthy. Hemingway’s postwar distrust of time-honored, accepted language may be traced to McKay’s inverted lexis, wherein the racist descriptor “nigger” can no longer instinctively denote the abominated Other. Next to the authorizing articulation of the New Negro, the slave term “nigger” is recognizable as white supremacist speech and therefore a signifier left over from a fading discourse. Hemingway’s employment of the double-n hyphenate may testify to Toni Morrison’s accusation of racism against the white author, but the “noble-looking nigger,” both the prizefighter and more dramatically the hyphenate itself, nevertheless confronts the received ideology of racism. Hemingway’s “noble-looking nigger” indeed demonstrates Morrison’s concept of the “Africanist presence” (6) in canonical American writing.

It is instructive when Hemingway’s caricature rematerializes in *Home to Harlem*, as Rousseau’s noble savage is transcribed naturalistically into the shape of the parodically versatile Jake Brown, no longer the marginal
figure, but the central character. Also a spoiler of white supremacy, Jake is a proletarian protagonist who nobly intervenes to take on two white union members double-teaming a black strikebreaker in an alley. But he does not need to do so authorized by white permission, as a pleasing and therefore safe black male who whips a white man inside the ropes. Indeed, Jack Johnson was a prototype of the New Negro, and Jake Brown is its literary exemplar. As Jake waves his belt buckle over his head, the two white men “shot like rats to cover” (46). Hemingway’s double-n fighter deconstructs in McKay’s image of Jake’s lash-like belt suspended above his head, the Hegelian dialectical hierarchy of master and slave, in Marxian manner, capsized.

Indeed, questions of race and nation leak into every pore of Hemingway’s novel. Offsetting Bill’s admiration for the black fighter is his, Jake’s, Mike’s, and even Brett’s scapegoating of the Jew, Robert Cohn. Cohn is a personification of the Judaism described in Nietzsche’s The Genealogy of Morals (1887) and The Antichrist (1888), the slave morality of “resentiment.” Taking his cue from Hemingway, McKay cites Nietzsche’s singular hypothesis in his memoir: “I thought the adoption of the Christ cult by Western Civilization was its curse; it gave modern civilization its hypocritical façade” (McKay 1937, 24). Nietzsche scholar Weaver Santaniello discusses how the German philosopher argued that, because it gave rise to contemporary Christianity, the “slave morality” of Judaism was the origin of the modern affliction. Hemingway’s Cohn attempts to impose morality on the riotous fiesta, or his own egocentric desire to control the physical abandon, the ecstasy, embodied in the festival’s fertility goddess, Brett Ashley. The Basque festival avails itself of Christian iconography, but this Roman Catholic shell does not succeed in masquerading the pre-Christian Bacchic carnival, the obscure, mysterious genesis of the Basque culture, its central drama being the human engagement with the primordial Spanish embodiment of brute violence, the bull. Irritated when American Catholic pilgrims, traveling to the Vatican on the same train as Bill and Jake, are served lunch en masse while the rest of the passengers go without, Bill Gorton remarks to their priest that he might join the “Klan” (88). The logic for Bill’s swing from admiring the “noble-looking nigger” to telling an American Catholic priest that he might enroll in the ranks of the KKK may be located in the staging of a flight from morality in The Sun Also Rises in order to locate the authentic primal self. The two racial minority figures—Cohn and the “noble-looking nigger”—are antithetic. Cohn’s presence corresponds to the unleashing of retributive, moral punishment, that is to say, violence invested in
controlling the Other and the world, according to Nietzsche’s eccentric hypothesis. The black prizefighter, on the other side, embodies the ritual of violence in order to perform the purity of the erotic, the primal dance of the animal body. The uncorrupted black boxer poses a counterpoint to the degraded Princeton pugilist Robert Cohn, the black fighter’s manifestation of natural manly arts standing in bare contrast against Cohn’s symptomization of ressentiment. The disturbing expression of anti-Semitism in *The Sun Also Rises* in effect enunciates the crucial arrival of the New Negro.

The black émigré, McKay, appropriates the white expatriate’s carnivalesque in order to write his own narrative of modern primitives, or primitive moderns, and in doing so exposes Hemingway’s heart of whiteness. Nevertheless and paradoxically, *The Sun Also Rises* authorizes McKay to stage the authentic experience of his Great Migration characters. As Hemingway did in writing *The Sun Also Rises*, McKay, in composing *Home to Harlem*, marked out territory for his own articulation of the modern. And yet, and perhaps most important, Hemingway’s narrative, in its declaration that the modern novel cannot “fake about life,” avails itself *avant la lettre* of *Home to Harlem*’s negritude *pase de pecho*. In this one may ascertain the bilateral exchange between Hemingway’s and McKay’s novels. The figure of the New Negro, a seminal innovation from the other side, provided the archaic dialect for Hemingway’s modern primitives. Indeed, McKay’s contribution to the Harlem Renaissance imagined the creative idiom for Hemingway’s dream of modern primitives in western Europe. Through this joining of voices, the two novels collectively fashion an edifying companion intertext of the interwar period, a dual and mutually informing vision of modern and primitive.

**Notes**

1. In pointing out neglected issues in Helbling’s *The Harlem Renaissance: The One and the Many* (1999), Scruggs’s book review presents an astute observation on McKay’s use of *The Sun Also Rises* for black radical purposes:

McKay’s sexually potent “Jake” deliberately signifies upon Hemingway’s sexually wounded “Jake,” but McKay’s point is not to rewrite Hemingway. Rather McKay shows that “The Great War” that hovers over Paris also manifests itself in the racial war(s) in Harlem. Imperialism in Europe, the cause of the “The Great War” and the basis of its peace process, takes the form of colonization back home, and thus Harlem is no safer for McKay’s Jake than the minefields in Europe were for Hemingway’s. (319)
As Scruggs's comment indicates, no extensive critical examination exists on the subject, a matter that my scholarship means to rectify.

2. Aside from a tradition of scholarship focusing on the representation of Cohn's Judaism, surprisingly little critical work on race and *The Sun Also Rises* exists. Traber examines how Jake Barnes “rejects particular dominant versions of whiteness” (235), but the essay is concerned with Cohn and the depiction of the Jewish character in Hemingway's writing. No scholarship concerns itself with the novel’s black-white raced intertextuality.

3. The notion of *The Sun Also Rises* taking its conception from *The Waste Land* goes back to a remark by Young in the early 1950s:

*The Sun Also Rises* is . . . Hemingway’s *Waste Land*, and Jake is Hemingway’s Fisher King. This may just be coincidence, though the novelist had read the poem, but once again here is the protagonist gone impotent, and his land gone sterile. Eliot’s London is Hemingway’s Paris, where spiritual life in general, and Jake’s sexual life in particular, are alike impoverished. Prayer breaks down, . . . a knowledge of traditional distinctions between good and evil is largely lost, copulation is morally neutral and, cut off from the past chiefly by the spiritual disaster of the war, life has become mostly meaningless. “What shall we do?” is the same constant question, to which the answer must be, again, “Nothing.” (244)

For a critical treatment of the Eliot-Hemingway intertext during the mid-1970s, see Adams.

4. Steele clarifies Lawrence's notion of “blood-knowledge” (xix–li).

5. On the question of whether he was simply riding the crest of success that had greeted Van Vechten’s book, McKay makes a good case that his novel cannot be dismissed as a black-behind-blackface impersonation of the “Nordic” author’s minstrelsy—if blackface accurately characterizes what Van Vechten was up to. McKay points out in *A Long Way From Home* that despite its purported resemblance to Van Vechten’s novel, *Home to Harlem* started as a piece of short fiction before *Nigger Heaven* came along, and he began developing the story, called “Back to Harlem,” into a novel at the urging of his publisher (282–83).

6. A relatively recent discussion of Hemingway’s encounter with gender/sex roles takes place in Eby’s *Hemingway’s Fetishism*.

7. Allyson Nadia Field explores how *The Sun Also Rises* “belongs to the tradition of period travelogues” (29). Hemingway was himself a travel writer.

8. Gauguin’s travel narrative, *Noa Noa: My Voyage to Tahiti* (1901), articulates the notion of the artist-explorer, the Western artist who discovers the genuine act of creation by residing in an alien, foreign location, enacted through sexual relations with indigenous women.

9. Wilde said of *la fée verte*, “After the first glass you see things as you wish they were. After the second, you see things as they are not. Finally, you see things as they really are, and that is the most horrible thing in the world” (qtd. in Ellman 1988, 469).

10. Edwards provides the most extensive discussion of how Léopold Sédar Senghor and Aimé Césaire credited McKay’s second novel, *Banjo* (1929), with being a kind of negritude manifesto (187–88).
Works Cited


