Archives Of Transnational Modernism: Lost Networks Of Art And Activism

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ARCHIVES OF TRANSNATIONAL MODERNISM: LOST NETWORKS OF ART AND ACTIVISM

by

ANNE DONLON

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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ABSTRACT

Archives Of Transnational Modernism: Lost Networks Of Art And Activism

by

Anne Donlon

Advisor: Jane Marcus

*Archives Of Transnational Modernism: Lost Networks Of Art And Activism* considers the work of several intersecting figures in transnational modernism, in order to reassess the contours of race and gender in anglophone literature of the interwar period in the U.S. and Europe. Writers and organizers experimented with literary form and print culture to build and maintain networks of internationalism. This dissertation begins to suggest some of these maps of connection, paying particular attention to people who played key roles as hubs within networks. British radical Sylvia Pankhurst’s 1920s publications, which have not been much considered in terms of literary contribution, put Claude McKay and S.N. Ghose in print in the early 1920s. Her newspaper and literary magazine comprise an early site of black British literature and transnational modernism. Like Pankhurst’s paper in the 1920s, black and Left newspapers, pamphlets, and broadsides in the 1930s provided space for alternative accounts of history, and challenged mainstream media representations that excluded women and people of color, promoted war, or failed to adequately resist fascism. Some of these projects, which have often been forgotten or set aside as minor or too political, reside in archives, especially the archives of women who served as editors and organizers. British writer Nancy Cunard and African American organizers Louise Thompson and
Thyra Edwards played important and largely unrecognized roles in the life of Langston Hughes’s poetry. Contrary to the common impression of Hughes’s late 1930s proletarian writing as masculinist, his poetry and his life prominently featured women activists—but this becomes apparent only by looking at their papers. Furthermore, Nancy Cunard and Thyra Edwards each made scrapbooks about the Spanish Civil War that provide alternative histories of the conflict itself, African American organizing efforts, and Republican exile that provide incisive supplements to existing Spanish Civil War scholarship. These writers and organizers created materials that—if recovered from their archives—challenge, revise, or refute existing narratives of the period between the World Wars.
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CHAPTER ONE

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ACROSS NATION AND RACE

The anti-air war monument “The Stone Bomb” was designed and built by Eric Benfield, and unveiled in Woodford Wells, Essex, beside the Red Cottage in 1936. The Red Cottage was the site of British antifascist Sylvia Pankhurst’s bookstore, café, and home in the 1930s. Pankhurst had come up through suffrage and socialist political movements, editing a newspaper through the 1910s and early 1920s. By the 1930s, Pankhurst had turned her efforts to the antifascist Abyssinian cause, supporting Ethiopia in the face of recent Italian aggressions, including aerial bombings. She founded a weekly newspaper devoted to this issue, *The New Times and Ethiopia News*. In the first issue, the Countess of Warwick commented on the anti-air monument: “This Monument is the first of its kind. There are thousands of memorials in every town and village to the dead, but not one as a reminder of the danger of future wars.”

Pankhurst and her allies advocated an international ban on aerial bombing. Aerial bombing of civilians had already been a reality in colonial sites in the Middle East. Bombing in Ethiopia, and in the near future, the bombing of Guernica, most famously, as well as other cities in Spain, created generalized fear of aerial bombing in the western cultural imaginary. The anti-air war monument accused the politicians who sanctioned such warfare, rather than celebrate and mourn the war dead as having made a necessary and noble sacrifice, as most monuments do. Supporters

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2 Patterson, *Guernica and Total War*. 
of the Woodford Wells monument adopted an unusual strategy, using a form typically reserved for patriotic memorials. Can the master’s propaganda tools disarm the master?

The monument is still in Woodford Wells, across from a pub, and obscured somewhat by weeds, according to an account I found when I searched online. It’s a destination I’ve had on my list of places to go when I’ve been in London to do research, but somehow the long tube ride to Essex from where I was staying in the city was twice put off until I’d run out of time. Perhaps my procrastination indicates some kind of melancholy ambivalence on my part to visit a mostly forgotten monument dedicated to a future without aerial warfare. Today’s asymmetric warfare certainly shows no signs of relenting, which is all the more reason that we ought to look to the perspectives of anti-fascists and anti-racists who engaged each other internationally in the 1920s and 1930s. They circulated perspectives, arguments, and research through the social networks of their time—letters, newspapers, pamphlets—to oppose repressive violence. Their international campaigns urged readers to lend support, sympathy, or solidarity to another group of people suffering under or fighting against a racist or fascist power.

Langston Hughes wrote a poem during the Spanish Civil War that made such a gesture; “Song of Spain” was printed in a pamphlet in Europe (paired with a poem by Federico García Lorca) and within an inexpensive collection of his poems in the United States. The poem prompts workers in the U.S. to recognize their relationship to people in Spain—as similarly vulnerable to fascist attack, and complicit in the bombings, unless they resist. “I, a worker, letting my labor pile/ Up millions for bombs to kill a child—/ I bought those bombs for Spain!” the speaker declares, and then appeals, “Worker, make no bombs again.” Finally, the speaker resolves, “I must drive the bombers out of Spain!/ I must drive the bombers out of the world!”

3 Wright, “The Stone Bomb.”
4 García Lorca and Hughes, Deux poèmes; Hughes, Gold, and International Workers Order, A New Song.
Though not a pacifist position (the poem also says that workers should guard some bombs “lest some Franco steal into our backyard”), the poem asks its international readership to consider how their work is complicit with fascist war, and how they can resist war. This question of the relation between one’s life, far from the site of violence, and a foreign war, remains compelling. For one thing, the implication is that the war ‘over there,’ could easily happen at home. Hughes’s poem conjures an image of the networks that connect capitalist production, fascist war, racism. National boundaries are almost irrelevant in the worldview the poem presents.

This dissertation explores literary and print forms that internationalists used between the world wars to challenge war, fascism, and the sexism and racism that sustained war culture. I focus on an interconnected, interracial, and international group of writers, and suggest a map of connections (albeit uneven connections) that linked them, with a particular focus on literary activity following the First World War, and during and after the Spanish Civil War. By cutting up the newspaper and creating new texts, by writing open letters and epistolary poems, and by founding alternative newspapers and presses, the literary figures included in this project experimented with form and print culture to create spaces and networks of internationalism. The evidence of these projects, forgotten or set aside as minor or too political, resides in archives—particularly the papers of women who served as editors and organizers. Sylvia Pankhurst’s 1920s publications *The Workers’ Dreadnought* and *Germinal* published black and colonial voices in East London. The Jamaican writer Claude McKay worked at her newspaper in 1920, and the articles he wrote for the paper introduce several themes that run throughout the latter chapters of this dissertation, as well as McKay’s later work. His articles present the racism that colonial subjects conscripted as soldiers face. He protests the widely accepted paranoia and panic directed toward the sexuality of black men. Turning this trope on its head, he suggests that white women
could play an important role in agitating for racial justice in the U.S. South because (and this turned out not to be the case entirely) they would be protected by the myth of white womanhood.\textsuperscript{5} He also wrote about the connections between the position of African Americans and colonial subjects in Ireland and India, and the potential for socialism within these groups.\textsuperscript{6} McKay and Pankhurst each used the historical expansion of the press to criticize mainstream positions, both on the Left, and in society at large. Later in the interwar period, figures like Langston Hughes, Nancy Cunard, Thyra Edwards, and Louise Thompson wrote for the black press and organized their own publications. Like McKay, they explored the potential for interracial, internationalist organizing, and protested the linked oppressions of colonialism and racism, particularly in times of war. Their print projects record perspectives and experiences that mainstream media wouldn’t cover. Langston Hughes wrote poems that celebrated black women activists around the Spanish Civil War. These poems challenge common assumptions about Hughes’s late 1930s political poetry, and proletarian literature more broadly.

The papers of Sylvia Pankhurst, Nancy Cunard, Louise Thompson, and Thyra Edwards contain forgotten texts and narratives of transnational modernism. Though these four women did not all know or work with each other, the materials in their archives come into conversation through their shared personal contacts. Their positions in literary history were marginalized in a variety of ways. If we aim to offer correctives to the legacy of masculinist and white supremacist accounts of literature and culture, I propose that scholars ought to pursue interpersonal connections among writers and editors engaged with internationalist politics, particularly in women’s archives. They created and preserved textual evidence of the international, interracial collaborations of the interwar period. Their ephemeral texts suggest new sites of transnational

\textsuperscript{5} The Workers’ Dreadnought, 31 January 31 1920, 1621.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid.
modernism, that make apparent, for instance, feminist gender politics in revolutionary writing, as well as wide-reaching, interracial and international literary friendships in the era of fascism. In addition to highlighting texts concerned with internationalist perspectives attentive to gender and race issues, the project also queries issues of memory, historiography, and canonization. In the final section of the dissertation, I consider Spanish Civil War scrapbooks by Nancy Cunard and Thyra Edwards as examples of alternative archives. They each tell a story not included in accounts of Spain in the scholarship or public memory surrounding that historical moment.

Figures who played key roles as hubs within networks are often reduced to a footnote in the life of a celebrated writer. Figures like Cunard, Pankhurst, editor Charles Barnett, collector Arthur Schomburg, and organizer Louise Thompson, created webs of contacts and collaborators, to mobilize political campaigns and circulate writing—but often their importance is lost in scholarship that tends to focus on major writers rather than the interpersonal networks that facilitated the writer's productivity. The archives of such figures contain information about connections among writers and movements. The letters and manuscripts evidence an interconnected history of literature and interpersonal exchange that goes against individualist accounts of literature. Mapping interpersonal networks in literary history offers a methodology that can be applied particularly well to locate those who did not necessarily appear in those networks as authors.

Among the connections this dissertation takes up are those between African American writers and white British women in the twentieth century. There is a long history of contact between members of the African diaspora in the Americas and politically active white women in Britain. In part, this dissertation wonders about the position of antiracist white women in the
history of the Black Atlantic. This transnational view emerges with the benefit of a convergence of several disciplinary “turns.” These points of contact are apparent in the texts that Atlantic and circum-Atlantic studies have highlighted. Literary engagements go back to the late seventeenth century, when white British woman author Aphra Behn wrote *Oronooko, or the Royal Slave*. In the eighteenth century, Olaudah Equiano travelled to England while still enslaved. He notes in his autobiography that the two sisters (“amiable ladies”) of M. Guerin, a relation of his master, “took much notice and great care of me,” and oversaw his education. Frederick Douglass toured the British Isles and Ireland, and met with many women sympathizers. Historically, white women played a major role in the abolition movement in Britain. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, those same abolition networks continued to advocate against lynching, racism, and forms of slavery other than transatlantic slavery. When Ida B. Wells toured Britain in the mid-1890s, campaigning against lynching, she used the space of Catherine Impey’s newspaper *Anti-Caste* to challenge preexisting British ideas about black and female sexuality. *Anti-Caste* took part in a political tradition that extended from the earlier nineteenth-century transatlantic abolition movement, and Quaker efforts in particular. The paper declared that it “Assumes the Brotherhood of all Mankind” and “claims for the darker members of the Human Family everywhere a full and equal share of Protection,

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7 Jane Marcus’s considerable work on this topic, evident in *Hearts of Darkness: White Women Write Race*, greatly influenced this dissertation. Her knowledge of Cunard’s friendships with Hughes and McKay and McKay’s contact with Sylvia Pankhurst at the *Workers’ Dreadnought* first set me off in these research directions.

8 Doyle, *Freedom’s Empire*; Ferguson, *Subject to Others*; Ferguson, *Colonialism and Gender From Mary Wollstonecraft to Jamaica Kincaid*; Davis, *Women, Race & Class*.

9 Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Or Gustavus Vassa, the African*, 75.

10 Some of his colleagues warned Douglass about his close associating with white women. He also apparently had a close relationship with a German woman (Soskis, “Heroic Exile: The Transatlantic Development of Frederick Douglass 1845 - 1847.”)


Freedom, Equality of Opportunity, and Human Fellowship.”

In the U.S., white women also played a prominent role in the abolition movement, and that abolitionist political discourse also influenced the rhetoric in the movement for women’s rights. As Angela Davis notes in *Women, Race, and Class*, in the 1830s white women of several classes in the U.S., including upper class, called themselves slaves. Women workers in mills equated their working conditions with enslavement, and women of upper and middle classes spoke of marriage as slavery, without considering the often vast contrast in the conditions of an enslaved person with that of a working, middle, or upper class white woman. Moira Ferguson notes that similarly in Britain women who joined the cause of women’s rights found a vocabulary and common cause with abolition. The metaphors of Wollstonecraft’s *Declaration* equated white women’s disenfranchisement with transatlantic slavery. Women in general may be excluded from full citizenship and public participation in society (or, as Woolf put it, have no nation), but the race, national origins, colonial status, class, and education of women impacts the diversity of privileges, exclusions, and oppressions they experience. White feminists have too often failed to acknowledge the variety of conditions of women’s lives, and have failed to incorporate struggles for racial freedom into their politics. White women who made anti-racism and anti-colonialism central to their political projects, navigated the complexity of interracial and international relationships and representations in a variety of ways. Certainly some were problematic. Nonetheless, the twentieth century history of women, black and white, who recognized and worked to overturn racism, colonialism, and class inequality, may offer some

13 *Anti-Caste*, Issue 1, 1.
15 Ferguson, *Subject to Others*, 9.
16 Ferguson, *Colonialism and Gender From Mary Wollstonecraft to Jamaica Kincaid*, 9.
insights into how to navigate these multiple oppressions in the present day.

Unfortunately, privileged individuals and institutions tend to charge the people that embody these race, gender, and class positions with educating the public about and resolving the inequality. Faced with the difficulty of doing justice to differing experiences of race and class, or benefiting from the status quo, those in power jettison these issues. I think of, for instance, Audre Lorde’s complaint about the feminist organizers of a conference that implicitly placed the burden on her, the black lesbian invited to participate, to educate white women out of their ignorance. She protested that this strategy was the same as that of men who continually place the responsibility on women to educate them about the inequities they refuse to recognize.\(^{19}\) Thus, the status quo can continue, while the conscience of the dominant side remains clear, as the problem results from a failure of the excluded to make a space for herself, rather than the failure of a society to transform its definitions of gender, race, and class.

While we won’t find a perfect model for acknowledging and navigating racial difference in the past, the histories of exceptional attempts (and their successes and failures) can provide important context and lessons for further work. In the late 19\(^{th}\) century, Catherine Impey arranged for the travel in England and Scotland of Ida B. Wells, a fellow newspaper editor, journalist, and an African-American anti-lynching activist. Wells was persecuted in the U.S. because she publicly rejected the common justification for lynching (the sexual threat to or rape of a white woman). Instead, she understood lynching as a repressive response to black achievement, and asserted evidence of consensual relationships between white women and black men. As Wells pointed out, the myth surrounding the womanhood of white women played a central role in the operations of white patriarchy.\(^{20}\) Thus, white women engaged in antiracist

\(^{19}\) Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 110.

\(^{20}\) Carby’s *Reconstructing Womanhood* presents this history.
political movements occupy complicated and often complicit positions, having difficulty acknowledging and countering the implications of their identity within this tenet of hegemonic U.S. society. Wells brought her arguments against lynching to Britain, to try to bring international pressure to end this violence (as Douglass and others had done in an effort to abolish slavery). If Wells provides an important example of an African American organizing interracially and transatlantically, her British guide, Catherine Impey, also illustrates an example of white women’s efforts to reach black America.

Catherine Impey also made an Atlantic crossing. She travelled to the U.S. and visited Frederick Douglass and his family. She published a memoir of her visit in an 1895 memorial issue of *Anti-Caste* following Douglass’s death. In the narrative, Impey uses several visual metaphors to describe the particularity of her subject position as she narrates her time with the Douglass family. She refers to her “English eyes,” and her “Quaker English eyes.”

Impey’s effort to describe her particular position as an outsider to African American culture highlights an ongoing question of how sympathetic, antiracist white women navigate their difference. Here, Impey attempts to avoid eliding differences or assuming similarity. Other authors I discuss here similarly invoked vision or visual representations as they negotiated interracial projects. Nancy Cunard, for instance, did not include photographs of any of the white authors in the anthology *Negro*, as a corrective to the excessive and sensationalized press attention she received for her contact with black men as she was making the anthology, as well as a corrective to the invisibility of black intellectuals and artists in the mainstream press. In this project's consideration of interracial and international relationship, questions of solidarity and collectivity—issues of “we”—are central. The narrator in Virginia Woolf’s *Three

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21 Impey, “A Sketch of the Life of Frederick Douglass.”
Guineas explains to her male interlocutor that “though we look at the same things, we see them differently.” The narrator and the man have different capacities to see, despite sharing pacifist politics, because of their difference in gender, education, and access to the public realm. Woolf, like Cunard and Impey, invokes visual elements that attempt to navigate subject position according gender, nationality, class, and race. Certainly, this history is fraught. The politics of upper class white women gazing upon racial Others has a long and problematic history.

The trouble with the “trans” of the term “transnational” is that it lacks specificity. It can mean bridging two (or more) uncontested spaces, or it can mean departing from those established spaces to create new political and aesthetic formations in the space between. The term can also obscure the conditions of that traversing—exile, cosmopolitan travel, war all involve “transnational” movements. Many fields within cultural and literary studies have undergone a “transnational turn,” in recent decades. However, it’s unclear what exactly is meant when transnationalism is embraced. Shelley Fisher Fishkin’s 2004 American Studies Association Presidential Address declared the “transnational turn in American Studies.” Fishkin remarked, “As the transnational becomes more central to American studies, we'll pay increasing attention to the historical roots of multidirectional flows of people, ideas, and goods and the social, political, linguistic, cultural, and economic crossroads generated in the process.” Today, when the discourse of globalization has entered the popular consciousness, it is probably not a coincidence we look to the “flows” and connections that don’t involve state borders in our scholarship. This academic focus can certainly mimic (or enable by obscuring) a neoliberal agenda, invested in facilitating capital’s mobility, free from interference from the nation-state.

However, when internationalists traveled and circulated writing across national borders in

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25 Ibid., 22.
the 1920s and 1930s, they developed a critical understanding of the transnational practices of colonialism and capitalism. Their experiences across national borders were not always celebratory. After all, the state’s surveillance also crossed national boundaries; various policing apparatuses impeded their travel. Langston Hughes called attention to this suppression in a 1937 speech:

Why is it that the British police seized Raj Anand’s passport? Why is it that the state Department in Washington has not yet granted me permission to go to Spain as a representative of the Negro Press? Why is that the young Negro leader, Angelo Herndon, was finding it most difficult to secure a passport when I last saw him recently in New York?²⁶

Hughes’s transnational history is a history of working against repressive national power. And this resistance takes place within a black intellectual tradition. Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* demonstrated that notions of western enlightenment were the product of engagements with African diasporic thinkers and their critical provocations. One of the foundational texts in the reconceiving of disciplinary boundaries, Gilroy’s text discards national borders in favor of the transnational and in-motion model of the black Atlantic for the site of his study. Gilroy points out the centrality of contact and exchange of ideas between black radical intellectuals from the Americas and European intellectual traditions.

Cold War academic and political culture obscured the interwar connections that crossed racial, national, political, and gender lines. From organizing campaigns to literary projects, black nationalist, Left, feminist, antifascist men and women from the Americas, Africa, Europe, and the Caribbean were in conversation in the 1920s and 1930s. But this comes as a surprise to a student in the twenty-first century who assumes the history of connections between African

²⁶ Hughes, “Too Much of Race.”
Americans and anticolonialist movements abroad, for instance, was a recent phenomenon. The history of interwar internationalism was obscured as an effect of the Cold War. Anything that faintly resembled communism was seemingly discarded by the academy in the West, and particularly in the United States. The international and interracial connections of the interwar period therefore seem revelatory and surprising to scholars working today, but these points of contact were apparent to participants in the 1920s and 1930s. C.L.R. James worked on both George Padmore's pan-African newspaper and a Trotskyist publication in the 1930s, and recalled that they saw themselves in the same struggle:

> When I hear people arguing about Marxism versus the nationalist or racialist struggle, I am very confused. In England I edited the Trotskyist paper and I edited the nationalist, pro-African paper of George Padmore, and nobody quarreled. The Trotskyists read and sold the African paper and . . . there were [African] nationalists who read and sold the Trotskyist paper. I moved among them, we attended each other's meetings and there was no problem because we had the same aim in general: freedom by revolution.²⁷

Subsequent historiographic and disciplinary patterns often obscured connections across movements, where scholars, institutions, and the figures themselves tend to be ideologically invested in presenting a polarized account, particularly during and in the wake of the Cold War. Among the canons that would have to be reformed if we take seriously this alternate archive of modernism is black British studies. Pankhurst's newspaper and literary magazine published writers of color in England from the Caribbean, Africa, South Asia. Her interwar publications are important sites in the history of black British literature. John McLeod's chapter in *A Black British Canon?* requests that scholars shift back the starting point for such a canon. He writes:

Rather than placing writers such as Sam Selvon and George Lamming at the beginning of a canonical tradition, which begins with the arrival of the SS Empire Windrush in 1948, what would happen if we were to think about the ways in which contemporary black British writers might be seen in part ‘following on’ (consciously or not) from black writers in Britain during the 1930s and 1940s: people like George Padmore, CLR James, and others.  

McLeod argues, “Making these figures ‘canonical’ might help expose an alternative genealogy of transnational black writing produced in Britain.” I would propose we move still further back in time, to the early 1920s. McKay and the many other authors from Africa, the Americas, and South Asia that Pankhurst published in her newspapers and magazine, provide us with another canon of transnational history. This moment prompts us to consider the historical relationship between the women's movement in Britain and black British literature and politics, and more widely between Europe and the Americas.

**Feminist Interventions**

My project builds on work by scholars in recent decades that have grappled with questions about race and empire in literature from the 1920s and 1930s. Feminist scholarship within modernist studies in the latter decades of the twentieth century brought a number of forgotten women writers to public light. Furthermore, scholars began to consider not only how

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29 Ibid.
30 The authors featured in Rado's edited volume *Rereading Modernism* provide a representative group of the figures whose works were recuperated with feminist modernist scholarship: Dorothy Richardson, Rebecca West, Virginia Woolf, Doris Lessing, Djuna Barnes, Gwendolyn Bennett, Nella Larsen, Helene Johnson, and more.
gender impacts what and how we read, but also the influences of race, nation, and empire. Feminist scholars began to interrogate these intersections. While a woman may have no nation, in the words of Virginia Woolf, women of the twentieth century are excluded from hegemonic power differently depending on their race, nationality, colonial status, class, education, and so on. Scholars began to expand definitions of modernism to query gender, temporal and geographic limits of modernism, as well as the exclusion of popular and middlebrow cultural forms.

As feminist scholars of modernism turned their attention to women writers like Djuna Barnes and Jean Rhys who had been forgotten or passed over as “minor modernists,” scholars began to analyze how race, nation, class, and empire appear in these texts. Modernism began to shift slowly away from the “make it new” paradigm of the masculinist trifecta (Pound, Joyce, Eliot) to something that came to be known as “new modernism.”

Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz describe the “transnational turn” within new modernism thus:

Scholarship that widens the modernist archive by arguing for the inclusion of a variety of alternative traditions; scholarship that argues for the centrality of transnational circulation and translation in the production of modernist art; and scholarship that examines how modernists responded to imperialism, engaged in projects of anticolonialism and

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32 Hinnov and Harris, *Communal Modernisms Teaching Twentieth-Century Literature and Culture in the Twenty-First-Century Classroom*, Introduction.
designed new models of transnational community.

New modernism has allowed scholars to expand what is considered “modernist” to include women and writers of color. Collections like *Gender of Modernism* identify neglected women writers, and offer a framework to consider them within modernist studies. In her introduction, Kime argues for expanding the canon beyond the “small set of male modernists and a limited number of texts and genres,” by taking “the politics and aesthetics of gender” into account.

The expansion of the modernist studies canon was prompted by other literary and cultural fields of study. Black feminist scholars undertook major text-finding efforts in order to extend the canon of American literature. Scholars shared bibliographies and teaching experiences in texts like *But Some of Us Are Brave: All the Women are White, All the Blacks Are Men*. Toni Cade Bambara’s *The Black Woman: An Anthology, Harlem's Glory: Black Women Writing, 1900-1950, Nine Black Women,* and Cheryl Wall’s *Women of the Harlem Renaissance*, collected and identified the work of black women writers. The title “All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men” points to the institutional neglect and omission of black women’s experiences and accomplishments in scholarly and popular media. Authors like Gwendolyn Bennett, Jesse Fauset, Nella Larsen, and Zora Neale Hurston found new audiences, thanks to these public archival recovery campaigns. Black feminists recovered, republished, and anthologized literary work by women that were never published, had gone out of print, or were published in a forgotten periodicals. My project’s method and ethos is deeply modeled on and indebted to preceding feminist, black feminist, and antiracist intellectual projects.

Another focus of the project is the connections between women writers and editors, which also has important precursors. Works such as *Gender of Modernism* and

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34 Scott and Broe, *The Gender of Modernism*, 16.
35 Hull, Scott, and Smith, *But Some Of Us Are Brave*. 
Shari Benstock’s *Women of the Left Bank* highlight the interconnection of the literary figures they highlight. The individuals featured in these studies read, reviewed, published, edited, and collected each other’s work. Brent Edwards’ chapter on the Nardal sisters in *The Practice of Diaspora* brought their contributions as translators, editors, and writers—not unlike the roles of the women I consider in this dissertation—to the attention of an Anglophone audience. Bonne Scott Kime maps the relationships between the authors collected in her introduction to *Gender of Modernism*, as well as in her monograph *Refiguring Modernism*. Kime argues, rather than the hierarchical approach found in many modes of literary study (identifying masters, defining high culture, and so on), modernism ought to be viewed as a web of interconnected relationships. Her graphical approach anticipates digital mapping projects like *Mapping the Republic of Letters*, which seek to visualize interpersonal connections.

Additionally, in the introduction to *Gender of Modernism*, Kime notes the potential for more work that links black and white writers, noting the relationship between Cunard and Zora Neale Hurston, H.D. and Paul Robeson, Nella Larsen and Van Vechten, and Jesse Fauset in Paris. Interracial friendships and collaboration between writers have tended to be less visible in the scholarship. The neglect of such discussions must be related to the persistent siloing of literature according to race. Similarly, national boundaries in literary study are stubbornly resilient; increasingly scholars do comparative or transnational projects, but structures like required survey courses and faculty job ads reinforce the hegemony of nation. Relationships between writers or literatures that cross nation as well as race don’t fit neatly into

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37 Scott, *Refiguring Modernism*, Figure 1, xxii.
38 “Mapping the World Republic of Letters.”
39 This gesture of acknowledging a race-related omission but not addressing it happens again toward the end of Marek’s *Women Editing Modernism*. She notes the importance of a number of African American woman editors of small magazines to mark their absence from the study.
the disciplinary structures of the academy. Nonetheless, there have been, of course, many individual projects that present transnational analysis that attends to people of color, and the contributions of people of color in realms that are commonly conceived of as white. Josh Gosciak’s *A Shadowed Country: Claude McKay and the Romance of the Victorians*, for instance, is one that I draw on in my discussion of McKay’s time in London.

The group of writers and editors I focus on in this dissertation were involved in Left political movements—a further reason that they and their literary contributions have been neglected. Their political affiliations meant they were treated with suspicion during and after the Cold War. While significant Left recoveries have taken place, many have focused on contributions of figures involved with the Communist Party. The writers and organizers I highlight here mostly operated alongside but outside of the Communist Party, and thus seem to have been forgotten. The role of women in these movements has been particularly absent from many recoveries of the 1930s Left, and the black Left, though there have been several recent correctives. Gregg Andrew’s recent biography of Thyra Edwards and Erik McDuffie’s *Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism* each provide instructive correctives to these oversights. Paula Rabinowitz’s *Labor & Desire: Women's Revolutionary Fiction in Depression America* and the anthology of women writers *Writing Red: An Anthology of American Women Writers, 1930-1940* populate an alternative canon of proletarian writing by women. For instance, finding the participation of activist women in black newspapers not only corrects the historical record, but changes the ways we read modernist and African American literature. Work like Carla Capetti’s “History, Mythology, and the Proletarian in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*” suggests a reading

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practice that accounts for the influences of proletarian literature and radical intellectuals on African American literature whose authors might not themselves have been involved in, or who even disavowed, such political activities. Capetti writes of proletarian literature’s influence on Zora Neale Hurston’s 1937 novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*: “Because this genre is not valued—just as the literature of African Americans, women, and immigrants was not valued—the conflicted proletarian aesthetic and antiproletarian politics of the novel remain invisible.” A range of critical possibilities emerge as we gain a sense of the reach of these political activities on the Left in the twentieth century.

In this project, I begin by looking at an example of transnational collaboration after the First World War. In the postwar period, a series of protest movements gained traction, at least briefly. The summer of 1919 was called the red summer of 1919, for the uprising and violent squelching of both radical political activity and black revolt in the United States. In the U.S., this racial unrest coincided with a Red Scare. Post-Russian Revolution fear of communism caused those in power to view immigrants with suspicion (particularly Jewish immigrants and immigrants from places thought to be hotbeds of radicalism, like Russia and Italy). In several American cities, returning black soldiers encountered the violence and lynching of American racism, which set off black protest. In the United Kingdom, too, there were riots in port cities, including Liverpool, Cardiff, and London, leading to violence against men of color. In African American culture, this was a moment of building cultural nationalism. Though the African American literature of the following decade tends not to be thought of in terms of radical politics, critics like William Maxwell and Barbara Foley point out that African American literature of the 1920s continued to demonstrate black nationalism and protest. Foley argues

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42 Capetti, 38.
that the cultural nationalism of the Harlem Renaissance was the binding force between 1919 and the 1930s. Foley writes, “between the revolutionary moment of 1919 and the renewed radicalism of the 1930s,” it’s the “notion, or at least the hope, that a ‘good’—that is, democratic—nationalism could be leveraged against the ‘bad’ nationalism of 100 percent Americanism.”

While Maxwell and Foley focus on the United States, a number of scholars’ work suggests that black resistance to “100 percent Americanism” was also forged through transnational engagement and experiences abroad. Claude McKay wrote his influential protest poem “If We Must Die” in 1919 while witnessing the violence toward black protest in the American cities. McKay left the United States for Britain, and in 1920 he found communities in London among the Coloured Soldiers’ Club, the leftwing International Club, and with eccentric British intellectuals. McKay’s move from the Americas to Europe was not unique. Langston Hughes worked on a ship, traveling around the world, and then lived in Paris. Vera Kutzinski, among others, has highlighted Hughes’s engagement with Europe, the Caribbean, Mexico, and South America. Laura Doyle underlines Nella Larsen’s travels to Scandinavia. Brent Hayes Edwards’ Practice of Diaspora and the essays in Braddock and Eburne’s Paris, Capital of the Black Atlantic highlight African American contact with francophone writers, editors, and translators in France. These experiences and literary works of the 1920s prepared the way for the radical internationalism of the 1930s.

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44 Foley, Spectres of 1919, 6.
45 McKay, A Long Way from Home.
46 Paul Gilroy has pointed out how many figures in African American literature were sailors, or otherwise involved in the shipping industry. Gilroy, The Black Atlantic, 12–13.
47 Kutzinki, The Worlds of Langston Hughes; Berry, Langston Hughes, before and beyond Harlem; Edwards, “Langston Hughes and the Futures of Diaspora”; Hughes et al., The Translations; Hughes and Mullen, Langston Hughes in the Hispanic World and Haiti.
FROM ALABAMA TO ETHIOPIA TO SPAIN

Among the campaigns that activated the international networks of organizing between the Americas and Europe was the Scottsboro Trial. In 1931, nine young men were arrested on a train and accused of raping two women. The men were black and the women were white; all were poor. In the miscarriage of justice that followed, the women were coerced to accuse the men of rape, and the men were repeatedly convicted and entered decades of appeals. The Scottsboro case gained national and international attention, largely due to resources devoted to the cause by local, national, and international communist organizations.\textsuperscript{49} Hughes, Cunard, Thompson, and Edwards were involved with organizing efforts, though at this point none of them were members of the Communist Party (and only Thompson would join, in 1934).\textsuperscript{50} Many intellectuals and activists traveled to report on the case and to advocate on behalf of the young men.\textsuperscript{51} Langston Hughes wrote many poems and a play, “Scottsboro Limited,” on the subject. Louise Thompson organized a march on Washington in support of the defendants.\textsuperscript{52}

Nancy Cunard published a number of pieces related to Scottsboro in her 1934 anthology \textit{Negro}, including her own essay “Scottsboro and Other Scottsboros.”\textsuperscript{53} She also organized a petition and letter writing campaign in Britain that garnered responses from writers including Ezra Pound, Andre Gide, and Hope Mirrlees.\textsuperscript{54} The appeal went out on letterhead from

\begin{itemize}
  \item Pennybacker, \textit{From Scottsboro to Munich}, 23.
  \item McDuffie, \textit{Sojourning for Freedom}, 76.
  \item A sense of the breadth of the organizing around Scottsboro is apparent in Pennybacker, \textit{From Scottsboro to Munich}.
  \item McDuffie, \textit{Sojourning for Freedom}, 75.
  \item Cunard, \textit{Negro Anthology}, 243–268.
  \item Cunard, “Scottsboro Appeal and Petition with Signatures, 1933.” Respondents also included John Banting, Laura Riding, Storm Jameson, Norman Douglas, Rebecca West, Augustus John, Samuel Becket, Barbara Ker-Seymer, Georges Sadoul, George Amheil, Solita Solano, Sinclair Lewis, members of the West African Students’ Union, as well as less recognizable respondents, including (self-identified) housewives, workers, seamen, a spinster, port worker, factory hand, fruit and vegetable merchant, and commercial traveller.
\end{itemize}
the Negro Welfare Association in London, of which Cunard was a member. In the files the Metropolitan Police kept on Cunard, they include reports from informants on her attendance at various meetings about Scottsboro, including her involvement in a group called “International Labour Defence London Coloured Committee,” to be known as the L.C.C.  

Campaigns around anti-racism, anti-fascism, pacifism, women's rights, Scottsboro, Ethiopia, and Spain, often employed circular letters. These were letters signed by activists and sympathetic intellectuals and artists that asked for monetary donations, petitions, letter writing, and other mobilization around these issues. These letters' multiple signatories begin to suggest a map of relationships: Johnston Kenyatta beside Naomi Mitchison beside Vera Brittain; Woolf beside Bertrand Russell beside Stephen Spender. Nancy Cunard was both an innovator of the open letter—as her epistolary projects *Black Man and White Ladyship* and *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War* demonstrate—and a master networker—as the variety of contributors to her 800-page anthology *Negro* shows.

One circular letter on the Scottsboro case, published in *The Week-end Review* on October 6, 1932, and clipped in Lady Simon’s papers at Oxford, adds an unexpected and previously unnoted supporter of justice for Scottsboro. On the occasion of an upcoming appeal in the Supreme Court, the signees appeal to the editor to remind the paper’s readers of the case. “The undersigned, then, in appealing for assistance, feel bound to give once more a brief summary of the facts so far undisputed.” The letter highlights the threat of mob rule in the U.S. and racism in the justice system, reporting that on the day of the first trial in Scottsboro, “the population is 1,500 but an estimated 10,000 were in the town, many armed, and with bands, processions, and demands for vengeance. No negro, of course, was on the jury.” In the final paragraph, the letter

55 Metropolitan Police, Special Branch. “Nancy Cunard: Negroes Welfare Association; Record File.”
56 “The Scottsboro Case,” The Week-End Review.
asks for money for the defense, and demonstrates the international range of the efforts: “In co-operation with Theodore Dreiser’s committee in New York and a similar committee in Germany, the following urgently support the appeal for funds.” Among “the following,” the third signee is Virginia Woolf—not one to normally be associated with Scottsboro organizing. H. Walpole, Julian Huxley, H.G. Wells, Aldous Huxley, Naomi Mitchison, Stephen Spender, Bertrand Russell, and Vera Brittain are among the 19 signatories. Some of those signees were part of the British Scottsboro Defence Committee, which published several pamphlets, including “We Were Framed!” The First Full Story of the Scottsboro Case. The Scottsboro Defence Committee included among its vice presidents, Brittain, Mitchison, and Eleanor Rathbone, MP; Johnston Kenyatta (later known as Jomo Kenyatta) was one of the joint secretaries.

Scottsboro for many acted as an initiation into large scale political organizing and reporting. As a student at Vassar College, Muriel Rukeyser travelled to Decatur, Alabama to report on the Scottsboro trial for the school paper. Her account, “From Scottsboro to Decatur,” describes the experience—her first trip South, that was punctuated by her arrest, along with her two travel companions and fellow reporters, charged with contempt of court, as a punishment for speaking to the black Afro-American editor in the courtroom, and carrying copies of the call for a student meeting at Columbia University. The narrative doesn’t deal with the court case, which, Rukeyser tells her readers, they can find in other news reports, but instead focuses on the experience of white anti-racist activists and reporters in the South. In particular, she recounts her own experience as a white woman in the police station. Throughout the article, their borrowed car’s New York license plates are lamented as what brought unwanted attention to the group. The sense of terror and dread that builds, as the car is parked outside the Negro drug store, and as car lights flash across the road, slowing and arcing, gives a sense of the problems of being black,

57 Rukeyser, “Scottsboro to Decatur.”
or being openly sympathetic to black rights, in Decatur. The corruption of the police and legal system is apparent. Rukeyser cited this experience in Scottsboro as one that was radicalizing, eye opening. In her autobiographical novel about being in Spain at the outset of the Spanish Civil War, she alludes to the immediateness of the case alongside the war in Spain, the landscape around them, and the Nazi-hosted Olympic games set to coincide with the interrupted People’s Olympiad. As they sit on the train, they’re “talking about Madrid, the Scottsboro case, New York skyscrapers, the Berlin Olympics, the tawny cliffs of the coast just beyond their vision, the slow trains traditional to Spain.”

The technologies of letter writing, pamphlets, and newspaper reporting played a large role in the sustained international pressure and attention toward the Scottsboro case. Kay Boyle’s “Communication to Nancy Cunard” (1937) invokes the multilayered address of many of these efforts. The poem is a curious communiqué. It is preoccupied with the recipient of its words. The title announces the poem is addressed to Nancy Cunard, but the poem itself is taken up by the speaker clarifying to whom she directs its message: “These are not words set down for the rejected.” Rather, “This is for the sheriff with a gold lodge pin” and “This is for two men riding, Deputy Sheriff Sandlin, Deputy/ Sheriff Blacock,” who shot Ozie Powell. A documentary poem, it records the racist system the young men known as the Scottsboro boys faced. The Scottsboro Trial that prosecuted them for rape was the object of international scrutiny and outrage. Boyle’s poem ought to be considered in light of other pamphlets, articles, poems, and circular letters of the time, published on both side of the Atlantic, and the intersections of race and gender in writing and reporting on the trial by women.

58 Rukeyser, Savage Coast.
59 Boyle, “A Communication to Nancy Cunard.”
60 Ibid.
61 Cunard translated the poem to French; a copy resides in her papers at the Harry Ransom Center.
The poem, though directed to Cunard in the title, could also be called “A Communication like Nancy Cunard’s,” as it resonates with Cunard’s own strategies, both in poetics and in politics. In her poems, Cunard often played with voice, seemingly as an internationalist gesture of solidarity—an attempt that is complicated by her race and nationality. For instance, when she ventriloquizes a white sheriff, lodging racial epiphets at a black interlocutor, the effect is uncomfortable at least for a reader today, though one suspects the same might have been true at the time of its composition. Lois Gordon notes that one of the sheriff’s remarks in Cunard’s poem is “taken from an article in the Southern Worker”—a strategy that Boyle adopts. Cunard’s poems on Spain, like “To Eat, Today,” and the postwar poems in French, “Nous les Gens d’Espagne” (We the People of Spain), also incorporate poems in others’ voices—Spaniards in the latter, and the Nazi bombers in the former. As Janet Montefiore notes, “To Eat, To-day” “angrily mimics the speech of the oppressor”—the same strategy as in “Southern Sheriff.”

The Italo-Ethiopian War also received sustained internationalist attention and action throughout the 1930s. When Mussolini attacked Ethiopia, a sovereign sub-Saharan African nation, antifascists and black nationalists from all over the world objected to the imperialist aggression. There were significant fundraising efforts among African Americans to send supplies to the African nation. The war was covered extensively in the black press in the United States, and the papers were outspoken in support of Ethiopia. Across the Atlantic, Sylvia Pankhurst founded the weekly New Times and Ethiopia News in May 1936. Its slogan and appeals to readers emphasized its antiwar, international justice agenda: “REMEMBER: Everywhere, Always, Fascism means War. WE STAND FOR INTERNATIONAL LAW AND

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62 Montefiore, Men and Women Writers of the 1930s, 118.
63 Scott, “Black Nationalism and the Italo-Ethiopian Conflict 1934-1936,” 120.
JUSTICE.” As with her other publications, the New Times and Ethiopia News appealed directly to its readership to take action. The first issue instructed, “Receipt of a copy of this paper is an invitation to assist.” Other radical or race-based publications appealed similarly to their readers, invoking the political charge of the publication. The black weekly Pittsburgh Courier, for instance, appealed to readers, “Help race relations: Mail your Courier to some white person.” These papers issued an imperative to their reasons to take action by virtue of their reading the paper. I find a similar imperative underwrites many of poems, pamphlets, and anthologies that I consider in this project.

The Spanish Civil War closely followed the Italo-Ethiopian War, both chronologically and in the antifascist imagination. Strategies of organizing and fundraising practiced around Ethiopia were expanded in the fight for Republican Spain. Nancy Cunard, for instance, travelled to Spain almost directly from Geneva, where she was reporting for the New Times and Ethiopia News on U.N.’s deliberations over whether to lift sanctions against Italy for attacking Ethiopia. She was finishing her pamphlet Ethiopie Trahie (Ethiopia Betrayed) up until her arrival in Spain in the summer of 1936, just after the war broke out. The African American nurse Salaria Kea, and many other African American volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, cited the war in Ethiopia as a motivation for service in Spain. A phrase from Oscar Hunter’s short story set in the Spanish Civil War, points to the affective link between Ethiopia and Spain for some African American volunteers. Spain was seen as the next arena for the fight against fascism: “It ain’t Ethiopia, but it’ll do.”

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65 Ibid.
66 This clipping appears in Thyra Edwards’ scrapbook in the Chicago History Museum.
67 Cunard, L’Ethiopie trahie; Hughes, Cunard, and Patterson, Poetry, Politics, and Friendship in the Spanish Civil War, 10–11.
68 Collum, Berch, and Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives, African Americans in the Spanish Civil War.
Antifascist internationalists viewed several struggles as resulting from the same structures of domination. This is how they argued that the war in Ethiopia was relevant to people in Spain as it was relevant to African Americans living in urban Northern cities. Poetry and poetic activity (reading, publishing, translating) sometimes provided a form to articulate these internationalist connections. Langston Hughes translated the Cuban poet Nicolas Guillén’s “Soldiers in Ethiopia,” a poem about Mussolini’s attack on Abyssinia, while they were in Spain together. Sylvia Pankhurst published Hughes’s translation of Guillén’s poem in the *New Times and Ethiopia News*. (I suspect that Nancy Cunard sent it to Pankhurst, because Cunard’s article “The Moors in Spain To-Day” ran in the same issue.) A few years earlier, Langston Hughes wrote “Air Raid Over Harlem,” which imagined an aerial attack on Harlem coinciding with a bombing in Ethiopia. The poem presents a continuum across spans of American history, linking violence during slavery in the South with police violence in the north, and events in Ethiopia effecting life in Harlem. The poem sets out an internationalist poetics that Hughes continued to elaborate in his Spanish Civil War writing. Hughes’s poetry, as well as his reporting for the *Baltimore Afro-American* in Spain, continually argued in content and form (using montage and epistolary form, for instance) for connections across geographic, national, racial, and linguistic difference. Specifically, he aimed to show that the war in Spain was relevant to the lives of African Americans struggling against racism at home.

I am interested in exploring the narrative and political possibilities of the prose and poetic

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69 There is a typescript of Hughes’s translation in Thompson’s papers, dated Madrid, September, 1937. “Soldiers in Ethiopia,” Louise Thompson Patterson Papers, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. The poem is also included in Hughes’s collected translations, Hughes et al., *The Translations*.


71 Ibid., 2 January 1938, 2, 6.

forms that Pankhurst, McKay, Hughes, Edwards, Cunard, and Thompson employed in their internationalist writing. Many critics have connected aesthetic and literary forms with particular political formations and the ideologies that support them. For instance, in the generic romance plot, a transgressive woman character is, in the course of the novel, tamed by marriage. This plot line reinforces and consolidates the heteronormative family, biological reproduction, and the nation.73 Letter writing, postal networks, and newspapers are technologies that historically facilitated the development of national and global imaginaries, like novels.74 Internationalists adopted these forms for their own purposes. The circular letter—published in a newspaper or as a pamphlet, with a host of signatures—is one of these ephemeral forms that should be considered more seriously as texts of modernism as well as a conceptual model for writing that invokes collectives, solidarity, and social networks.75 These letters were public appeals co-signed by activists and sympathetic intellectuals and artists that asked for monetary donations, petitions, letter writing, and other mobilization around these issues. The multiple signatories suggest a map of relationships. They begin to signal, if in a modest way, a multiplicity of positions on, accounts of, and investments in a cause.

Scholars of literary modernism do not regularly examine radical newspapers, scrapbooks, letters, and manuscripts as sources of texts themselves. However, these materials often point to unknown histories; little-read texts come to the surface. These archival forms contain information that can shift our understanding of modernism. The seriality of newspapers, open-ended-ness of epistolary forms, and the fragments that comprise the scrapbook prompt readers—

73 Sommer, *Foundational Fictions*; Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*.
75 This inclusion of ephemeral materials has been happening already, of course. Scott and Broe, for instance, include letters in *The Gender of Modernism* and are interested in the connections between writers that correspondence evidences.
then and now—to reconsider history, social formations, and national authority. These formal strategies were not unique to the writers I focus on—after all, many modernists dealt in fragments and reacted to the social strictures of modern culture. However, by looking to the archives of four women on the periphery of canonical literary history who engaged with writers across nation and race, I recover texts of transnational modernism that change common understandings of the social movements and literature of this moment—including a new appreciation of gender politics in proletarian literature, and exceptional examples of anglophone Spanish Civil War historiography.

“CUT WITH A KITCHEN KNIFE”

Ephemeral forms were important to the political literature and writing of this period, not least because they were cheap and thus accessible to a wider range of people, and faster to circulate. Thus, internationalist literature found formal and practical reasons to use ephemera to record perspectives not represented in the mainstream. In Three Guineas, Woolf’s narrator notes the absence of women’s history from scholarly texts and biographies, and explains that women excluded from the public realm must look to the newspapers for evidence of their lives:

The evidence that such a body [the Outsiders], whether named or unnamed, exists and works is provided not yet by history or biography, for the outsiders have only had a positive existence for twenty years—that is since the professions were opened to the daughters of educated men. But evidence of their existence is provided by history and biography in the raw—by the newspapers that is—sometimes openly in the lines, sometimes covertly between them.76

The newspaper clipping is a key source for Woolf. Her narrator demonstrates how one might use

76 Woolf, Marcus, and Hussey, Three Guineas, 136.
the newspaper to evidence misogyny, record women’s achievements, and resist patriarchy. “We must consult the newspapers,” the narrator instructs. Creators and viewers of critical scrapbooks, collage, montage, and photomontage can practice Woolf’s narrator’s method of reading openly in the lines, and sometimes between them. The German photomontage artist Hannah Höch used images from mainstream media to interrogate a society’s positions on empire, women’s bodies, the government, and other prominent tropes in Weimar Germany.

Hannah Höch’s photomontages are a helpful intertext to Three Guineas. Her “Heads of State,” for instance, takes aim at German politicians. The men are pictured in swimming outfits, cut out from the newspapers, and placed on an embroidery patterns. Woolf deals with similar themes, critically juxtaposing men in power with the domestic realm, and mocking the ornate costumes of the military. Woolf includes images of ruling men into the text. The uneasy juxtaposition of image and text creates ironic and cutting critique. Implicitly, Woolf prompts her readers to join her in radically debunking the patriarchs’, and the photographs’, authority. The reader must make some kind of sense out of the juxtaposition—and in comprehending the satirical, ironic, or critical argument, they must adopt, at least briefly, its message. The reader or viewer plays an active role in making the meaning.

Some scrapbooks similarly use critical juxtapositions to comment on the materials they contain. The scrapbook form lends itself to political engagement because the scrapbook’s creator, like a modernist collage artist, can unsettle the normal, quotidian ways an individual consumes mass media. By strategically selecting and juxtaposing newspaper clippings and cultural ephemera, the scrapbook's author can critique and manipulate materials from the public

77 Ibid.
78 Lavin and Höch, Cut with the Kitchen Knife, 17, 19.
79 This type of engagement of the reader resonates with Rancière’s Emancipated Spectator, which suggests that liberation is the movement from a passive role of consumption to action. I discuss this further in Chapters 2 and 3.
realm in politically suggestive ways. The Harlem bibliophile Alexander Gumby’s scrapbooks on
African-American culture repurpose mainstream newspapers and photographs to create
alternative historical texts.\textsuperscript{80} Gumby's 161 scrapbooks, now housed in Columbia’s Rare Books
Library, assemble a massive amount of material into volumes organized under titles primarily
related to African-American culture, ranging from topics of history, work of black intellectuals,
to popular culture, celebrity, and athletes. He also intersperses his own personal correspondence
and souvenirs in the pages. By placing letters from a friend alongside articles from national
newspapers, Gumby makes an implicit claim about the interconnectedness of personal and
political realms. Scholars who write about scrapbooks have described the form as
autobiographical, an example of life writing, comparable to a journal or diary.\textsuperscript{81} But Gumby's
scrapbooks and the reading notebooks Woolf compiled as she was writing what became \textit{Three
Guineas} go far beyond a personal record to record cultural attitudes, forgotten histories, and
women’s, or African American culture.\textsuperscript{82} They gather the materials of the public realm and
arrange them to create new meanings. This evidences an important modernist strategy, innovated
by women and people of color, to speak back to mainstream narratives. This project, then,
considers several examples of writers’ engagement with newspapers, pamphlets, letters, and
scrapbooks. This dissertation assumes that in the archives of women modernists—particularly
women modernist who acted as editors and publishers—there remain so far untapped texts that
change our understanding of the period.

Chapter One considers Sylvia Pankhurst’s 1920s publications as sites of transnational

\textsuperscript{80} Gumby, “Scrapbooks, Alexander Gumby Collection of Negroiana.”
\textsuperscript{81} See, for instance, Helfand, \textit{Scrapbooks}. Patricia Buckler distinguishes scrapbooks from letters and
autobiography in her chapter in Tucker, Ott, and Buckler, \textit{The Scrapbook in American Life}. Buckler
points out that we find in letters “spontaneity and brevity,” and scrapbooks tend to be created “closer to
the actual events they reflect than are memoirs” (63–64).
\textsuperscript{82} Woolf, Pawlowski, and Neverow, “Three Guineas Reading Notebooks.”
modernism. Pankhurst’s inclusion of black and South Asian authors was rather outstanding among publications on the British Left, or literary magazines. The Jamaican poet Claude McKay worked at Pankhurst’s weekly newspaper, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, while he was in London in 1920. He published poems and articles in the paper. Intriguingly, some of the topics he covered in his *Dreadnought* articles (life on the docks, colonial conscription) reappear in his fiction later in the decade. He distanced himself from this time with Pankhurst’s paper in his memoir, however. Like many of McKay’s recollections in *A Long Way from Home*, written after his politics had shifted away from communism, his account of his time at the *Dreadnought* disavows any serious investment on his part. I consider McKay’s retrospective remarks in the memoir to be among the reasons this episode in literary history has been set aside. Pankhurst’s work as an editor, and literary editor, has not attracted much attention, either. But her publications were doing some exceptional things.

Pankhurst founded a short-lived literary magazine in the early 1920s, *Germinal*. The magazine advertised itself as having an international audience (with readers “as far apart as Gower Street, London, and Santiniketan, India”), and included poems, stories, and reviews from authors with ties to the Soviet Union, India, the United States, South Africa, Germany, France, and Britain. The latter section of the first chapter will consider the short stories of the Bengali author S.N. Ghose published in *Germinal* and *The Workers’ Dreadnought*. His works of fiction, written in English, have not been discussed either in relation to Ghose’s later work, nor as an early example of fiction by a South Asian author in English, or in England. McKay and Ghose’s presence in the pages of Pankhurst’s publications suggest that scholars could expand the canon of Black British literature, as well as transnational modernism, to include these early examples. They also suggest that there may well be further publications, writers, and editorial or
collaborative relationships that have yet to be recovered. Pankhurst’s position as an outsider—outside the Communist Party, on the far Left, feminist, anti-imperialist, anti-racist—meant that she has been left behind in the “women editing modernism” conversation as well as studies of the British Left.  

The second and third chapters discuss texts from during and after the Spanish Civil War that similarly revise assumptions about genre and literary histories. In the second chapter, I examine a newly recovered epistolary poem by Langston Hughes in order to reassess the intersections of gender in Hughes’s political poetry, as well as to suggest the epistolary form’s internationalist application in Hughes’s poetics. The letters and manuscripts exchanged between Langston Hughes and women activists—Nancy Cunard, Louise Thompson, Thyra Edwards—evidence a rich, productive literary network. These women’s archives contain a number of poems and ephemera that shift common readings of Hughes’s late 1930s work. The political poetry of the late 1930s, including Hughes’s, tends to be thought of as masculinist, dogmatic poetry. Just as Paula Rabinowitz’s Labor and Desire pointed out the presence of an alternate women’s archive of revolutionary writing within 1930s proletarian literature, this chapter highlights the presence of women activists in Langston Hughes’s poems and the life of his poem.

Chapter Three argues that the Spanish Civil War scrapbooks of Nancy Cunard and Thyra Edwards intervene in the anglophone historiography of the war and record

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83 Marcus discusses Pankhurst’s strategy for operating outside of these larger parties and organizations as a feminist strategy, rather than as evidence of isolationism or egomania, as some have implied. Marcus writes, “feminist historians will see immediately the intellectual and political logic and the interconnecting links between the positions, since they also mark the careers of other great twentieth-century women and are memorialized in Virginia Woolf’s Three Guineas.” Marcus, “An Activist’s Activist,” 12.

Women editors in modernism have been highlighted in scholarship including Marek, Women Editing Modernism; Benstock, Women of the Left Bank.

Pankhurst has been the subject of several biographies, however, which make the case for her significance. 84 Hughes, Cunard, and Patterson, Poetry, Politics, and Friendship in the Spanish Civil War.
experiences of women, children, and refugees. These scrapbooks, archives unto themselves, reflect on the violent erasure of things lost to fascist, Nazi, and Francoist aggressions, and represent life after the war for Republicans in exile in France and Mexico. Edwards’ scrapbook evidences the broad coalition of African Americans that organized on behalf of Spain, involving organizations and individuals on a wide political spectrum. Cunard’s scrapbook, Cosas de España, 1936-1946, composed in 1949, assembles her “Things from Spain.” The scrapbook includes captions in French, narrating the context of various photographs, manuscripts, and ephemera. This paratextual effort, aimed at a francophone audience, is an example of Cunard’s multilingual efforts to build internationalism. More broadly, the chapter explores the scrapbook form as a form for modernism and African American studies to reconsider. As a woman’s form that curates public and private fragments, it has the potential to be put to critical use, challenging or supplementing mainstream media accounts.

The conclusion offers a methodology for recovering women’s archives, and suggests some future steps, including the possibilities digital archives brings to these questions. Archives as theorized by Foucault, Derrida, Stoler, tend to look at institutional archives, records kept by the state. Certainly, many of the figures in this dissertation were under surveillance at home and abroad, and appear in state files. In Cunard’s Metropolitan Police file at the UK National Archives, for instance, we see a different kind of scrapbook, with clippings of newspaper articles about her, as well as typed accounts from informants of her location, activities, and movements. My work is more interested, however, in documentary projects that these figures

85 This chapter resonates with other recent scholarship on scrapbooks: Brinkman, “Scrapping Modernism”; Garvey, Writing with Scissors.
86 Derrida, Archive Fever; Stoler, Along the Archival Grain; Foucault, Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language.
87 Holcomb, Claude McKay, Code Name Sasha; Smith, British Writers and MI5 Surveillance, 1930-1960.
88 Metropolitan Police, Special Branch, “Nancy Cunard: Negroes Welfare Association; Record File.”
intentionally created as activists, artists, and writers, working outside of institutional apparatuses. Many of the sources this project draws on now live in institutional repositories, as they have become sources of cultural capital for universities or libraries. For the most part, however, at the time of their creation in the 1920s and 1930s, the manuscripts, proofs, ephemera, and clippings, were created and saved without institutional backing.

The fragmentary archives that these figures created, and which this dissertation draws upon, were often vulnerable to the conditions of exile and poverty their creators faced. This vulnerability is apparent in the damage to Alexander Gumby’s rare book and scrapbook collections during his hospitalization, Walter Benjamin’s lost trunk and life, and the note that prefaces Nancy Cunard’s scrapbook on the Spanish Civil War that states that many more materials existed but were destroyed “under the boot of the Nazis” who pillaged her house. Her archives were vulnerable to the right wing targeting of her home in the North of France during the occupation in World War II, as well as her later poverty and illness. Women’s archives present particular challenge, as so often in history women’s contributions were not deemed important enough to archive. However, the subjects I studied here generally had dedicated collections in institutions. If the materials were preserved long enough to be collected, they may now be accessible in archival boxes and folders. But that “if” can loom large.

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89 Gerson discusses the challenges to searching for women within archives in her introduction to Kadar and Buss, *Working in Women’s Archives*, 7–8. She writes, “women’s papers often survive only because they have been preserved in the papers or organizations whose public significance extends value to their correspondents or members” (14).
In the British Library, there is a box of poems that E. Sylvia Pankhurst wrote in prison, on toilet paper. The library’s finding aid dates them to her imprisonment during the suffrage movement, but the poems are almost certainly from her later imprisonment in 1921 for violating the Defence of Realm Act, by publishing allegedly incendiary stories in her weekly London-based newspaper, *The Workers’ Dreadnought.* She published many of the poems written on these scraps of toilet paper after she was released from prison in her collection *Writ on Cold Slate.* Pankhurst’s title for the book emphasizes the temporary and contingent life of the poems. It’s a curious title, though, since the poems seem to have been preserved on paper, in fact, and smuggled out of the prison. The poems are a bit of a performance. Smuggled toilet paper certainly doesn’t enjoy a secure existence, but the slate suggests a still further order of vulnerability in materiality. One of Pankhurst’s poems elaborates on the conditions of prison writing indicated in the title. While “in other ages . . . kindly warders would the tablet bring,” the speaker reflects:

Only this age that loudly boasts Reform,

Hath set its zeal of vengeance ’gainst the mind,

decreeing nought in prison shall be writ,

save on cold slate, and swiftly washed away.

In her lines of blank verse, she chides contemporary anti-intellectualism. Pankhurst defies the age’s decree that anything written in prison must be temporary, by preserving and publishing these lines. The use of the word “save” to mean “except” brings out the tension in Pankhurst’s poem between the impulse to save (as verb), with the regulatory imperative to deny. In the

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90 Pankhurst, “Letters Written from Prison by Suffragettes.”
92 Pankhurst’s prison writing places this collection of poems in a lineage with a range of prison writing, particularly of political prisoners, where incarceration provides space for reflection, and mental escape.
space between the slate invoked in the title and the bound leaves of paper that comprise the book, remain the toilet paper manuscripts. Pankhurst doesn’t let her readers in on the secret that it was toilet paper that allowed for the prison writing to be preserved and circulate beyond the walls. (Perhaps she didn’t want to call attention to this transgression immediately after her release from Holloway Prison.) Nonetheless, she saved the scraps of paper for long enough that they are now preserved in an archival box among the British Museum’s manuscripts.

Just prior to Pankhurst’s arrest, the Jamaican poet Claude McKay was working at the Dreadnought. The police raided the Dreadnought office, looking for evidence of incriminating publications, particularly to identify the author of “Discontent on the Lower Deck,” an article that advocated British navy sailors revolt. According to McKay in his autobiography, he ran upstairs, smuggled the incriminating article out of the office, ripped it up, and flushed it down a toilet to protect the identity of their source. The urinal has been a symbol of transgressive modernism since DuChamp turned one upside down; this episode in the history of the Dreadnought makes the flush toilet an archival one. These two texts—the poems written

As a prisoner of the state, she resists the strictures placed on her life, and defies the rules in order to record her experience. The shadow of a white savior complex is also attached to the term “save.” White reformists, who often included white women of a certain class, can undermine equality, agency, and enfranchisement for the objects of their advocacy. The poems describing working class women in the prison contains an echo of slumming narratives. McKay, A Long Way from Home. It seems likely that a toilet would be present in East London at this time. During the Victorian era, major plumbing efforts were undertaken in London. With Thomas Crapper’s invention of the flush toilet in the late 19th century, and the success of his toilet production company, it seems well within the realm of possibility that McKay’s account of flushing the manuscript down the toilet is accurate. There’s a story that American soldiers returned from World War I using the term “crapper” as a synonym for toilet, due to the ubiquity of his toilets labeled with the company name in England (though the veracity of that story is disputed). Reyburn,Flushed with Pride, 78–79. See also: Wright, Clean and Decent the Fascinating History of the Bathroom & the Water Closet and of Sundry Habits, Fashions & Accessories of the Toilet Principally in Great Britain, France & America. For another discussion of archives, McKay, and toilet-related technologies, see Edwards, “The Taste of the Archive.”
on toilet paper, and the manuscript flushed down a toilet—illustrate the deliberate preservation and the inevitable erasures in women’s radical archival projects. In the history of anti-racist and anti-fascist organizing between the world wars, writers and editors went out of their way to create and document alternative histories. However, the policing of these movements effected strategic and violent disappearances. This dissertation attempts to recover texts that were preserved, and mark the absence of others. By looking at these counternarratives to the history of the years between the World Wars, we gain knowledge of a history of feminist writing against war culture that can inform our own responses to the wars of today.
In his 1937 memoir *A Long Way from Home*, the Jamaican writer Claude McKay mistakenly recalls that he began to write for the British radical Sylvia Pankhurst’s London weekly, *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, when her paper published his letter to the editor, which the *Daily Herald* refused to publish. McKay did publish his letter in the *Dreadnought*, but it wasn’t his first contact with Pankhurst’s paper. He began to write for the *Workers’ Dreadnought* in January 1920, and it was only in April 1920 that he published the letter to the editor. As Wayne Cooper and Robert Reinders note in their article on the writer’s time in London, “McKay’s account may be somewhat awry.” McKay spent time in England from 1919 to 1920. The Grays, two siblings with aspirations of founding a utopian society, sponsored his trip from New York to England. With letters of introduction for George Bernard Shaw and C.K. Ogden, and the communities of the International Club and a club for colored soldiers, McKay entered London’s literary, socialist, and diasporic worlds.

This chapter will consider Pankhurst’s publications as sites of transnational modernism, where writers from the British empire found space to publish in the metropole. It will also consider why Pankhurst has not been recognized as such a figure within literary modernism. Part of the problem, I’ll argue, is disavowal on the part of Claude McKay. McKay set Pankhurst aside in his memoir, recalling her as a vigorous and principled but somewhat ridiculous figure. I’ll also

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briefly consider a similar phenomenon with the less well-known Bengali author S.N. Ghose. I haven’t found any account specifically of the time during which he published in Pankhurst’s publications, but his political shift away from socialism meant that he was not eager to revisit his early publications and affiliations. At the top of a story from the *Workers’ Dreadnought* in his papers at the British Library, Ghose wrote, “*Sotisse! Très stupide + infantile!*” I propose we rescue his short stories from this judgment. The authors of transnational modernism sometimes set aside or obscured their personal histories of transnational modernism. As these writers’ political leanings shifted, they distanced themselves from their social relationships and their writing from earlier times.

The circuits of transatlantic radical publications brought McKay into the orbit of Pankhurst's newspaper before he even arrived in England. McKay came to London from New York, where he'd worked at Max and Crystal Eastman's publication, *The Liberator*. Pankhurst published McKay’s poem “If We Must Die” on September 6th, 1919. The *Dreadnought* declared, “We take from the NY Liberator . . . these poems by Claude McKay.” The headline identified McKay by race: “A Negro Poet.” McKay's poem, which was provoked by the race riots set off as black soldiers returned to U.S. cities, might have resonated with Pankhurst's local experience in East London, which, along with a number of port cities in Britain, underwent its

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3 McKay also had connections with Britain through his mentor in Jamaica, Jekyll, and Jekyll’s sister Gertrude, who facilitated the reviews of *Songs of Jamaica* (which included rich descriptions of nature, botanica, and landscape) in gardening magazines (Gosciak, *The Shadowed Country*, 87–88.). When McKay arrived in England, he contacted C.K. Ogden, with a letter of introduction from Walter Fuller (Ibid., 99.). Ogden, in Cambridge, eventually published McKay’s volume of poetry with an introduction by I. A. Richards. This convergence of 19th century reformers, gay men, with McKay’s socialism and anti colonialism points to another unexpected simultaneity that happens when one traces interpersonal connections.

4 Cooper, *Claude McKay*, 99-100.

5 McKay, “If We Must Die,” *Workers’ Dreadnought*, September 6, 1919.
own race riots in 1919.\textsuperscript{6}

As a poet, McKay combined the forms of high British literature with a sensibility immersed in Caribbean epistemology (evident in the botanical knowledge embedded in his pastoral sonnets, as Josh Gosciak has argued), and socialist values.\textsuperscript{7} McKay grew up in Jamaica at a time when British reformers and socialists were taking refuge there.\textsuperscript{8} Walter Jekyll, a white British transplant to Jamaica, mentored him and encouraged him to write poetry. Jekyll encouraged McKay to use Jamaican dialect in his poetry, which McKay did in his first book of poems, \textit{Songs of Jamaica}.\textsuperscript{9} McKay also met Sydney Olivier, the socialist Jamaican governor at the turn of the twentieth century, through Jekyll.\textsuperscript{10} These older British men, involved with socialism and reform movements in England, were of the same generation as Pankhurst’s parents, who were involved in socialist politics in Manchester during her youth. McKay and Pankhurst were relatively close in age; Pankhurst was seven years older. They shared an intellectual background, not only through imperial literature and history curriculums, but also in their political influences. While in England, McKay was also friendly with C.K. Ogden, a rebellious intellectual based in Cambridge, the same age as McKay. Ogden helped McKay publish \textit{Spring in New Hampshire and Other Poems} (a title McKay didn’t particularly like, but Ogden convinced him to use in order to signal a connection to New England poets like Robert Frost). Josh Gosciak’s work on McKay’s queer and political relationships with these British men in Jamaica and England suggests an important through-line that also connects McKay and Pankhurst, and the British suffrage and socialist politics she stood for. Pankhurst and McKay were similarly influenced by nineteenth century reform movements that aimed to transform

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\textsuperscript{6} Jenkinson, \textit{Black 1919}.
\textsuperscript{7} Gosciak, \textit{The Shadowed Country}, 79.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 53.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 55.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 43–44.
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language, aesthetics, and the world. McKay’s distance from organized radical politics in later years, and the importance of his work within African diasporic literary traditions, has somewhat obscured his connections to these British radicals.

According to *A Long Way from Home*, McKay’s memoir, he met Pankhurst, “who had deserted the suffragette for the workers’ movement,” at the International Club—a place where, “Socialists, Communists, anarchists, syndicalists, one-big-unionists and trade unionists, soap-boxers, poetasters, scribblers, editors of little radical sheets which flourish in London” all met. He describes Pankhurst, “a plain little Queen-Victoria sized woman with plenty of long unruly bronze-like hair.” Her appearance was “on the whole…undistinguished.” But “her eyes were fiery, even a little fanatic, with a glint of shrewdness.” He elaborates on this intimation of Pankhurst’s personal fanaticism in his characterization, and slighting, of her political movement, calling it “the Pankhurst group and its rather hysterical militancy.” It was “more piquant than important.” His description of Pankhurst’s political stance is a bit more admiring: “she was always jabbing her hat pin into the hinds of the smug and slack labor leaders. Her weekly might have been called the Dread Wasp. And wherever imperialism got drunk and went wild among native peoples, the Pankhurst paper would be on the job.”

This endorsement of her anticolonial commitment, however, is somewhat undermined by his recollection that she suppressed his scoop that a sawmill that George Lansbury “owned or partially owned” was using scabs during a strike. Despite the importance of the story, and despite

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1. Gosciak summarizes “some of the dominant discourses in the late Victorian and early modern periods, such as internationalism, pacifism, the Arts and Crafts movement, decadence, Fabian socialism, and sexual rebellion” (1).
3. Ibid., 76.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
the Dreadnought’s general antagonism toward Lansbury’s Daily Herald and what it represented as the vehicle for mainstream British socialism, Pankhurst squashes the story. McKay surmises Pankhurst did so out of a personal allegiance to Lansbury, or because she owed some money to him. Later, when she criticizes McKay for a flattering profile of a leader of a union instead of interviewing rank-and-file members, he reflects “I resented the criticism, especially as Pankhurst had suppressed my article on Lansbury.” He reflects, later on, “she was a good agitator and fighter, but she wasn’t a leader.” He dismisses her influence: “it was a one-woman show, not broad-based enough to play a decisive role in the labor movement.”18

McKay’s memoir in general distances him from any serious engagement with radical politics. His account of his 1922 visit to the Soviet Union and the Comintern Congress emphasizes his deferring opportunities to speak publicly, despite the importance of his foundational speech “On the Negro Question,” that resulted in the Communist International’s Black Nation Thesis, and a series of action in the U.S. South (where the Black Belt, and the site of this “nation within a nation” was to be located) through the first half of the 1930s.19 By the time McKay is writing his memoir in the late 1930s, he’s left behind those radical politics, particularly those formally associated with the Communist Party. He recounts his travels and encounters with these various political figures, but with the distance of irony and humor.

Among the revisions that McKay makes in his memoir, I’m particularly intrigued that McKay misconstrues the chronology of his time at the Dreadnought, placing the publication of his letter to the editor as his point of entry into the paper. “Socialism and the Negro” was the front-page story on January 31, 1920, but his letter to the editor was not published until April. This mistake is relatively minor, and seemingly innocuous, but it suggests to me something about

18 Ibid., 87.
19 Kelley, Hammer and Hoe.
McKay’s understanding of the newspaper as a venue for social engagement, maybe even despite himself. As a form, the letter to the editor serves the purpose of entrance. It allows readers to appear in the pages, voice their views, and enter a conversation. The letter to the editor is an act of public intervention. In his letter, McKay intervenes to protest the depiction of people of color as hypersexual and threatening (a topic consistent with his political interests in the late 1930s, unlike “Socialism and the Negro,” which was his actual first article for the *Dreadnought*).

Walter Benjamin reflects on letters to the editor in "Work of Art in the Age of Reproducibility (Third Version)." With the explosion of print culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, more and more people had access to publishing their views. In the essay, Benjamin notes (and even laments) that readers are "turning into" writers. He attributes these transformations to the letter to the editor:

> It began with the space set aside for ‘letters to the editor’ in the daily press, and has now reached a point where there is hardly a European engaged in the work process who could not, in principle, find an opportunity to publish somewhere or other an account of a work experience, a complaint, a report, or something of the kind. Thus, the distinction between author and public is about to lose its axiomatic character.²⁰

Benjamin seems to feel some dread at the prospect that any person in Europe feels entitled to be published, but the expansion of the press held particular promise to those potential writers who were historically kept from the hegemonic public realm, like white women, people of color, and colonial subjects. The huge increase in publications in the age of mechanical reproduction gave such individuals the opportunity to speak back to the mainstream press and establish their own newspapers.

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McKay's letter to the editor demonstrates the effects of this change. He writes as a black Jamaican to protest the racist arguments published in a white, British, socialist newspaper. Though that newspaper doesn’t publish him, Pankhurst’s paper provides a space for such dissenting voices. Pankhurst’s newspaper was exceptional among left British publications for its inclusion of black writers and attention to African and African-diasporic viewpoints. Barbara Winslow notes *The Workers’ Dreadnought* was “the only British socialist newspaper that had black correspondents.”

To give a sense of the international scope of the paper, an article on agricultural workers in Argentina followed McKay’s “Socialism and the Negro.” Later on in the same issue, two of McKay’s poems appeared on a page of the *Dreadnought* following the article "The Colour Bar: A Cry from South Africa." This international range was not exceptional for the publication.

According to *A Long Way from Home*, newspapers were also a part of McKay’s connection to another club he joined in London, this one for "colored soldiers," located on Drury Lane. He brought several black newspapers to the club, because the soldiers were interested in what black Americans "were thinking and writing." He brought "The Crisis, The Messenger, The Negro World, the Pittsburgh Courier and the Chicago Defender." He also wrote about the club for the Garveyite paper *Negro World.* McKay engaged with the newspaper to voice opinions and strengthen ties within his imagined communities. Though McKay gained an ironic distance from the institution of the newspaper in his later writing, at this point in 1920 he genuinely engaged with newspapers as a form of communication. He used Pankhurst’s

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21 Winslow, 128.
24 Ibid.
newspaper as a vehicle to sound dissident strains within British socialism, and used black newspapers from the U.S. to make connections with other members of the diaspora in London.

Since McKay did not introduce himself to *The Workers’ Dreadnought* through his letter to the editor, as he claims in his memoir, perhaps he answered the January 1920 ad that declared: "Helpers Wanted! Clerical Help would be most welcome at the ‘Dreadnought’ Office, 152, Fleet Street, E.C. Will those who have free time please inform us what time they can give?"  

Shortly after, Pankhurst published another poem by McKay. The socially committed lyric "Travail" presents "toilers" who "bend to the mighty task/ Of making the earth fit for human living." The poem’s speaker notices "new voices shrieking/ Their jarring notes of life-exalting strife," and finds an object of desire in his search for "the grandest purpose, the noblest path of life." These "new voices shrieking"—perhaps Benjamin’s reader turned writer—spurs an ethical resolve in the poem’s speaker.

McKay explored topics in the *Dreadnought* that he pursued in other venues throughout the rest of the decade. For instance, McKay’s first *Dreadnought* article, "Socialism and the Negro," makes an argument consistent with his position in his 1922 speech at the Comintern Congress in the Soviet Union. McKay identifies the U.S. South as a potential site to target for organizing. The article also shows McKay's sympathies with nationalism. Noting his own interest in the Garvey movement, he wrote, "for subject peoples, at least, Nationalism is the open door to Communism." He proposes anti-colonialism, including anti-colonial nationalism, as a most important socialist effort, and criticizes the blindness of white British socialists to this strategy, commenting:

\[\text{27} \text{The Workers’ Dreadnought, January 1920, 1493.}\]
\[\text{28} \text{Ibid., January 31, 1920, 1493.}\]
\[\text{29} \text{Ibid.}\]
Some English Communists have remarked to me that they have no real sympathy for the Irish and Indian movement because it is nationalistic. But, to-day, the British Empire is the greatest obstacle to International Socialism, and any of its subjugated parts succeeding in breaking away from it would be helping the cause of World Communism.³¹ McKay, a Jamaican in the metropole, a product of empire, argues to the British Left that they ought to align themselves with anticolonial movements.

At the Comintern Congress in 1922, the Communist International adopted the strategy of minority nationalism to foster communism. McKay’s spokesmanship in his “Report on the Negro Problem” resulted in the “Black Nation Thesis,” which established a nation-within-a-nation in the Black Belt region in U.S. South, to locate African-Americans as a national minority.³² Nation status at this time had great traction not only because of a recent Soviet policy to foster nationalism among national minorities, but also in the western liberal tradition, Wilson's Fourteen-Point Plan at Versailles accounted certain rights to minorities that constituted a nation, including statehood.

McKay’s *Dreadnought* article “Socialism and the Negro” also comments on race and sexuality. McKay was an attuned observer and commentator on the racial and sexual politics of the U.S. and the U.K. throughout his time in England. McKay recalled in his memoir an episode in which a black boxer who’d just won a fight at a match organized at the International Club, and a man who enthusiastically congratulated him, until the boxer introduced his white wife, and the admirer’s mood suddenly changed.³³ McKay was attuned to the social implications of colonialism, to racism within the political Left, the symbolic role that white women were ascribed in that racism, and the spectre of black sexuality in white society. His writing for the

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Dreadnought, like his later fiction, drew on these understandings.³⁴

In “Socialism and the Negro,” McKay suggests that antiracists manipulate the valorization of white womanhood by sending white women to organize in the U.S. South. In a move that follows Ida B. Wells and anticipates Hazel Carby (another Black Briton looking toward the U.S.), McKay identifies the centrality of the myth of white womanhood in black oppression. He tries to subvert its power. He suggests white women can play a unique role in the struggle for racial justice:

Coloured men from the North cannot be sent into the South for propaganda purposes, for they will be lynched. White men from the North will be beaten and, if they don't leave, they will also be lynched. A like fate awaits coloured women. But the South is boastful of its spirit of chivalry. It believes that it is the divinely-appointed guardian of sacred white womanhood, and it professes to disfranchise, outrage and lynch Negro men and women solely for the protection of white women.

It seems then that the only solution to the problem is to get white women to carry the message of Socialism to both white and black workers.³⁵

McKay argues that white women can have a particular role in undermining Southern racism. He proposes women as political agents, and, like the militant suffrage movement that Pankhurst took part in, conceives of ways that patriarchal expectations for lovely and refined white women can be used for political gain.³⁶ He makes this claim while working at a socialist newspaper run by a white woman in East London. East London had its own history of racialized violence.

In 1919, in England, as in the United States, the Caribbean, and elsewhere, white

³⁴ His 1928 novel Banjo, for instance, deals with many of these themes directly.
³⁶ Ross, Slum Travelers, 26.
residents erupted in violence against people, mostly men, of color.\textsuperscript{37} The \textit{Dreadnought} took an outspoken stance on those attacks on people of color. One article, “Stabbing Negroes in the London Dock Area,” argued that white working class men’s should forge solidarity, rather than violent animosity, with the sailors, because, the article pointed out, the sailors are victims of colonialism and capitalism, exploited to fight wars and work on behalf of white capitalists.\textsuperscript{38} As McKay would do after he arrived at the \textit{Dreadnought}, the article explicitly dealt with the role of sexual paranoia in fueling these attacks. The \textit{Dreadnought} article dismissed the desirability of white women and—in a complicated claim, not without its own pitfalls—argued that surely the men would likely prefer to have a black wife if only their colonial condition hadn’t prevented it. While East London and Chicago erupted in race riots, McKay and Pankhurst each took a public stand against the racist violence. Pankhurst’s presence in East London, as editor of a radical newspaper that opposed racism and exploitation, suggests a historical role of white women, other than as symbols of white womanhood, in the Black Atlantic. McKay imagines this potential role in his January article.

The symbolic power of white womanhood was also a concern in the letter to the editor that McKay published in the \textit{Dreadnought} in April 1920. In his letter, McKay leveled a critique of a white British labor movement that was complicit in circulating racist rhetoric. McKay's letter was addressed to George Lansbury, the editor of the socialist newspaper the \textit{Daily Herald}. It responded to an article by E.D. Morel that the \textit{Daily Herald} published earlier that month. Morel was a loud, virulent critic of the French occupation of Germany's Rhine Valley by Senegalese soldiers who were serving in the French forces. Morel argued in his article, “Black Scourge in Europe: Sexual Horror Let Loose by France on the Rhine,” as he did in various

\textsuperscript{37} Jenkinson, \textit{Black 1919}.
\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Workers’ Dreadnought}, June 7, 1919, 1354.
pamphlets and speeches, that the presence of the African soldiers presented a threat to the white women of Europe. When the *Daily Herald* refused to print McKay’s letter to the editor, McKay published it in *The Workers’ Dreadnought*.

McKay argued forcefully against Morel's claim that black people were unable to control their sexual urges. McKay did so without denying black sexual agency, and used himself as an example of a person of color with a sexual life. He wrote in his letter, “I, a full-blooded Negro, can control my sexual proclivities when I care to, and I am endowed with my full share of the primitive passion.”

The socialist *Daily Herald* refused to publish the letter. In fact, Morel saw the *Herald’s* editor, Lansbury, as a hero of his cause. In a speech, Morel lauded him for publishing his work: “There is the natural unwillingness on the part of the Allied Press to deal with a subject embarrassing from every point of view. The *Herald* had the great courage to speak out. George Lansbury has added to the debt we all owe him.”

McKay recalled in the memoir, “As the boss of the *Daily Herald*, [Lansbury] stood at the center like an old bearded angel of picturesque honesty, with his arm around the neck of the big trade-union leaders and Parliamentarians and his left waving to the Independent Labor partyites and all the radical Left. Like a little cat up against a big dog, the *Workers’ Dreadnought* was always spitting at the *Daily Herald*.”

Lansbury had a particular relationship with the *Dreadnought*, as he sometimes helped with printing needs, and in the later case of the sawmill strike, Pankhurst refused to publish criticism against him. But in this case, Pankhurst published McKay’s letter against the *Herald’s* editorial stance. Morel was a prominent figure on the British Left, who had previously been an outspoken actor in the fight against the Belgian control of the Congo, and a pacifist during World

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42 Ibid., 78–79.
War II. The acceptance of his racist arguments about the Senegalese soldiers points to the tolerance of such stances within the mainstream British Left, which McKay and Pankhurst aimed to call out.

In keeping with a foundational tradition in the West, Morel creates terror around the possibility of miscegenation in order to move white men politically. He also courted endorsements from white women’s groups. He spoke to the Women's International League, arguing, “You cannot quarter tens of thousands of Africans, big, powerful, muscular men with fierce, strong natural passions—you cannot quarter these men upon a European countryside, without their women folk, without subjecting thousands of European women to willing, or unwilling, sexual intercourse with them.”43 This rather erotic description and the spectre of “willing, or unwilling, sexual intercourse” apparently moved the group to pass a resolution. They affirmed, “in the interests of good feeling between all the races of the world and the security of all women to prohibit the importation into Europe for warlike purposes of troops belonging to primitive peoples.”44 Morel's widely reprinted pamphlet Horror on the Rhine included an endorsement by Frau Rohl, Socialist Minister of the Reichstag: “We appeal to the women of the world to support us in our protest against the utterly unnatural occupation by coloured troops of German districts along the Rhine.”45 This mobilization of women’s groups is counter example to Pankhurst’s feminist project and McKay’s conception of white women’s potential role in the South of the United States.

McKay and Pankhurst rejected Morel’s premise that black sexuality posed a threat to Europe or European women. McKay did not deny people of color sexual urges, nor did he make a conservative argument about the importance of marriage. McKay challenged the Herald, a

43 Ibid, 12.
44 Ibid.
45 Morel, The Horror on the Rhine.
socialist paper, and, more broadly, the culture of the British Left, to reject such racist and imperialist positions. Pankhurst herself was no stranger to demanding the British Left be more accountable—to women, and to revolutionary, anti-Parliamentarian politics. Like McKay, she didn’t subscribe to the sexual mores of her time, and proudly had a child without being married. Her publication of McKay’s letter to the editor of the *Herald* is in keeping with her exceptional position on the British left.

During this time, McKay also befriended C.K. Ogden. The same month that McKay published his first article in the *Dreadnought*, McKay also contacted Ogden, sending a letter of introduction written for him by the American pacifist Walter Fuller (who he knew through Crystal Eastman). Ogden was a linguist at Cambridge, known for disrupting the status quo there. He was part of the Heretics group, with I.A. Richards and James Woods; they started the *Cambridge Magazine*. Ogden was in London in 1920, and he and McKay explored the city together. They spent time at Bloomsbury institutions, like the British Museum and the 1917 Club, as well as the International Club, and places where South Asian and African diasporic students met. Ogden saw potential for McKay’s poetry as a test case for his theory of Basic English, and the interaction between language and systems of colonialism, for instance. Ogden read, edited, and helped to publish poetry by McKay. *The Cambridge Magazine* published a selection of poems, and then he published a chapbook, *Spring in New Hampshire and Other Poems*. The chapbook included an introduction by I.A. Richards. McKay later republished many of the poems in the U.S. as *Harlem Shadows*. The American edition included the radical “If We

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46 Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, 188.
48 Ibid., 100.
49 Ibid., 106, 108.
50 Ibid., 102, 109.
51 Ibid., 109.
Must Die,” but Ogden pushed McKay to excise the poem from his British publication. “If We Must Die” could appear in Pankhurst’s paper, but was not considered fit for publication in heady literary circles, at least not by Ogden. *Harlem Shadows* also shifted the geographic imaginary from temperate New England to nocturnal Harlem. McKay navigated the various wishes and expectations of the British intellectuals and radicals who supported him or facilitated his publication, as he did in the U.S., and throughout his career. These biographical insights may help to explain his hesitations to embrace these contacts in the recollections in his memoir.

McKay’s time at the *Dreadnought* reached a climactic moment when the police raided the *Dreadnought* office, arresting Pankhurst for violating the Defence of Realm Act. In October 1920, the *Dreadnought* published an article titled "Discontent on the Lower Deck," written by a sailor in the British Navy whom McKay had met. The sailor was a devoted reader of the paper, and McKay arranged copies for distribution on the sailor’s ship. Then the sailor wrote an article that expressed his frustration with the navy. He advocated a class-based, anti-war stance: "Stand by your class. Men of the lower deck: Are you going to see your class go under in the fight with the capitalist brutes who made millions out of your sacrifices during the war?"

Soon after the article was published, the London police raided the *Dreadnought*’s office, and prosecuted Pankhurst under the Defence of Realm Act. Her trial and appeal, and the role of McKay's reporting in the trial, reveals perceived threat of the cross fertilization of antiracism and socialism.

When the police arrived to raid the *Dreadnought* office, McKay ran upstairs and smuggled the incriminating article’s manuscript out of the office to protect the identity of the source. He ripped up its pages and flushed them down a toilet. He recalled in *A Long Way from* 

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that as he left the office, he encountered the police:

"And what are you?" the detective asked.

"Nothing, Sir," I said, with a big black grin. Chuckling, he let me pass. (I learned afterward that he was the ace of Scotland Yard.) I walked out of that building and into another, and entering a water closet I tore up the original article, dropped it in, and pulled the chain.  

McKay manipulated the officer's racism in order to avoid scrutiny. McKay's retells the encounter with language of racialized performance. McKay responds to the officer with his first act of erasure: "Nothing." This self-effacement allows him to complete the second erasure—disappearing the manuscript. The toilet provides a suggestive symbol for archival inquiry, both as an opening into an infrastructure that largely exists underground, and as a site of alternative sexual culture. Writers like McKay and Pankhurst, who refused the sexual mores of their day, went out of their way to create and document alternative histories. But the policing of their movements also resulted in strategic and violent erasures. McKay’s later self-effacement of his investment in sites of radicalism, most notably in his memoir, is another kind of discarding that we should watch for as we deal with radical histories and literatures. He is careful to distinguish and distance his position from Pankhurst, in a way that doesn’t make a reader particularly curious to investigate their contact further. However, he seems to have erased an important element in the end of his time there.

Though McKay obscured the identity of the author of “Discontent on the Lower Deck” when he flushed the manuscript down a toilet, the authorities still managed to punish The Workers’ Dreadnought for publishing this and other articles they considered incendiary.

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53 McKay, A Long Way from Home, 83.
54 Ibid.
Pankhurst was arrested in October 1920, and charged under the Defence of Realm Act. She delivered the legal brief in her appeal in January 1921. In her presentation to the court, Pankhurst objected to the court's interpretation of the article, and she also objected to the fact that she was being held responsible despite the fact that she didn’t author the allegedly incriminating articles. She defended herself with fierce critical readings of literary texts. She argued for a different interpretation of the evidence against her, by comparing the content of “Discontent on the Lower Deck,” “Yellow Peril on the Docks,” and other Dreadnought articles, to radical but canonical texts that were not considered a threat to the state.

The account of the raid and its aftermath in McKay's memoir downplays the centrality of his own reporting in this scandal. His account removes him as an actor and places him instead in a witnessing role. McKay dwells on the article by the sailor, “Discontent on the Lower Deck,” to explain the charges against the Dreadnought. He recalls the episode of hiding the author’s identity with spectacular detail and humor. The humor obscures the seriousness of the moment in his life. He glosses over Pankhurst’s sentencing, alluding to it only in relation to the author of “Discontent on the Lower Deck.” He explained, “as editor of the Dreadnought, she had taken the full responsibility for his article, and her difficult situation in the movement would be made worse if the police should get him too.” The transcript of Pankhurst’s brief in the appeal suggests that McKay was more central to the debacle than he lets on. He doesn’t include the fact that the article, “The Yellow Peril on the Docks,” written under the pseudonym Leon Lopes, was one that the court considered criminal, and upon which they sentenced Pankhurst. McKay's biographer Wayne Cooper notes “Leon Lopes” was very likely one of McKay's pseudonyms. “Yellow Peril,” like McKay's letter to the editor, objects to white men’s physical and verbal

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55 McKay, A Long Way from Home, 84.  
56 Cooper, Claude McKay, 123.
attacks on workers of color for their sexual relationships with white women. What he neglects to recall in the memoir, is that Pankhurst also took responsibility for his article. Along with the manuscript of “Discontent on the Lower Desk,” he has also flushed away his own identity as the author of the other incriminating article, “Yellow Peril on the Docks.”

In her testimony at the appeal, Pankhurst argued that “Yellow Peril on the Docks” and "Discontent on the Lower Decks" were not advocating looting or senseless violence, but rather were part of a scientific, rational attempt to transform society. McKay’s biographer Wayne Cooper and Robert Reinders’ article on McKay’s time in England explains that McKay left London shortly after Pankhurst’s imprisonment, feeling that the policing in Europe was getting out of hand. But perhaps the anxiety was even more personal. The central role of his article in the trial that put Pankhurst in prison may explain more specifically McKay's anxiety around the police in London, and perhaps also his aversion to publicly claiming Pankhurst more seriously later on (dismissing her movement as “more piquant than serious”). If one of his articles was the object of scrutiny that contributed to sending Pankhurst to prison, perhaps he felt more sharply vulnerable. Perhaps he also felt survivor’s guilt; Pankhurst took the fall partly for his article.

Pankhurst's appeal was an unconventional legal performance, thoroughly antiparliamentarian and revolutionary. Pankhurst cited what she called "standard books" that advocated a message similar to the allegedly incriminating articles, in order to show that if such books were collected in libraries without controversy and were not the object of criminal investigations then neither should her paper be. She juxtaposes her discussion of these

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\[57\] Pankhurst, “Appeal of Miss Sylvia Pankhurst against Sentence of Six Months Imprisonment [.....] for Articles in the Workers’ Dreadnought.”

\[58\] Cooper and Reinders, 78.

\[59\] McKay, Long Way.
Dreadnought articles with writing by William Morris, Karl Marx, Engels, and other authors and thinkers who methodically challenged the present society. She cites these authors’ works at length in her speech. She argues that since these books are not under scrutiny in court, neither should her newspaper’s articles be. The court officers began to object as Pankhurst read lengthy passages during the appeal—they questioned how the texts were relevant. Pankhurst's approach was not legally sophisticated (as she and others noted during her own defense), but it was literary. She edits her appeal, compiling quotations from other articles in the paper and other books in conventional libraries to show the acceptability of the ideas her newspaper put forth.

At one point in the appeal, she reads from William Morris's News from Nowhere at length, introducing it as a book her father gave her as a child (to show that such ideas have circulated for a long time, and were judged innocuous enough that the book was given to a child). I underline the introduction of Morris’s utopian novel News from Nowhere as evidence in the court, not only for the imaginative possibilities and provocation of this imagined future world in the face of the repressive state apparatus, but also because Pankhurst wrote her own speculative fiction in a similar vein a few years later. In the appeal, Pankhurst reads a passage about Parliament to the court. In Morris’s utopian future, the house of Parliament is repurposed as a dunghouse.60

Her invocation of William Morris's anti-parliamentarianism in the appeal is additionally intriguing because at almost this exact time, Pankhurst broke with the British Communist Party and Lenin over Parliamentarianism. She opposed the decision that the British Communist Party engage in electoral politics and affiliate itself with the Labour Party. Lenin and the Communist International took the other side, supporting the CP in Britain working with Labour. Her account

60 Morris, News from Nowhere, Or, An Epoch of Rest Being Some Chapters from a Utopian Romance, Chapter 11.
of her travels in the Soviet Union, *Soviet Russia as I Saw It*, described the Soviet leadership as sympathetic to her antiparliamentarian stance, and mocked the British Parliamentarians that were present. The narrative was serialized in the *Dreadnought* during her imprisonment, often posting the next installment on the front page. However, the Communist tide turned against her position, as she stood now too far to the Left. She and Lenin exchanged public statements of their disagreement. After this moment, the *Dreadnought* declared itself part of the Trotskyist Fourth International.

Pankhurst’s appeal was unsuccessful, and she was sentenced to prison. Pankhurst’s literary interests continued. The *Dreadnought* continued to be published while Pankhurst was in prison. Norah Smyth took over the editing. Pankhurst’s appeal proved popular among readers of *The Workers’ Dreadnought*. The February 12, 1921 issue reported, "Our special issue containing the Verbatim Report of Comrade Pankhurst's speech at her appeal, IS SOLD OUT. At the request of several comrades, it will be republished shortly in pamphlet form." The paper gave updates on Pankhurst's prison sentence, published letters of support from around the world, and gave notice of rallies and meetings held at the jail. George Bernard Shaw wrote a letter to Pankhurst while she was in prison, which was published in the *Dreadnought*:

My Dear Sylvia Pankhurst--

I am very sorry your appeal has not succeeded; though, like all the sensible people in the movement, I am furious with you for getting into prison quite unnecessarily. Why didn't you make up your mind to keep out of prison, instead of persistently breaking into it? The lion will let you put your head into his mouth, because the law says he must; but if you shake your hairpins in his throat, he is only too glad to have an excuse for snapping.

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61 Lenin’s letter to Pankhurst was published in the *Dreadnought* on January 1, 1921. Pankhurst’s reply, “An Open Letter to Comrade Lenin,” was published January 24th.

However, there is no use scolding you now; so keep up your spirits, and look forward to the day of your deliverance.

G. Bernard Shaw

Shaw chides Pankhurst for being unreasonably provocative, and invokes an extremely gendered symbol to demonstrate her insensibility. She’s betrayed “the movement,” and all of British socialism looks down upon her, it would seem. Shaw’s fixation on women’s fashion accessories, and the danger they pose to sensibility, carelessness, and resonates with the position he takes toward his subject in his 1928 *Intelligent Woman’s Guide to Socialism*. There, he again urges restraint to women radicals, and recommends that those who want to challenge convention take on one reform at a time: “For instance, if you rebel against high-heeled shoes, take care to do it in a very smart hat.”

McKay, for his part, talked about Pankhurst’s metaphorical hatpin, which she would jab “into the hinds of the smug and slack labor leaders,” and take to battle against imperialist attacks on colonized peoples. The characterization links women’s accouterments with a special kind of gendered antagonizing, but an antagonism that McKay respects. George Bernard Shaw also features in McKay’s time in England. Upon leaving for London, McKay most of all wanted to meet Shaw. With a letter of introduction from Frank Harris, McKay contacted Shaw and they met. Shaw disappointed McKay’s expectations, somewhat. Rather than connect over literature, as McKay had hoped, when McKay told Shaw he was a poet, Shaw told him he should have been a boxer. The ends of hatpins and hairpins strike one differently, depending on the object of

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64 Jabbing an antagonist with a hatpin was a cultural phenomenon for women at the turn of the century. In *Beware the Masher: Sexual Harassment in American Public Places, 1880-1930*, Kerry Segrave reports that “the hatpin was ubiquitous in this era and women often used it to fend off harassers” (84). McKay revives this trope to illustrate Pankhurst’s socialist and anticolonial activities. By the 1920s, it was a somewhat outdated response (Abbott, “Hatpin Peril”).
their jabs.

Pankhurst’s encounter with the justice system was prepared by her time in the suffrage movement. With her mother, Emmeline, and sister, Christabel, she was part of the militant Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU). The group would infiltrate Parliament, hold marches, and break windows. In prison, many engaged in hunger strikes, and were subsequently force fed with feeding tubes, a violent penetration that caused long term damaged to hunger strikers’ throats. The WSPU’s suffrage activities were spectacular, making the most of visual and theatrical propaganda. Sylvia Pankhurst’s legal performance in her appeal was a strategy learned from the suffrage movement, and in particular from her sister Christabel who was trained in law but could not practice because of her gender. Shaw accuses Sylvia Pankhurst of provoking the state in 1921, shaking her hairpins into the lion’s mouth. His specifically gendered metaphor resonates with a basic strategy of the WSPU’s militant actions. They purposefully transgressed societal expectations for women, and women of the middle and upper class. Though Sylvia Pankhurst moved away from the WSPU in favor of working-class issues, she seems to have retained the knowledge of how to productively antagonize those in power. These comments about her metaphoric hatpins and hairpins highlight how she turned on expectations for women in order to resist imperialism and political suppression.

Pankhurst wrote poems in prison, after she lost her appeal. She wrote them on toilet paper. Today they are preserved in a box in the British Library. The finding aid misidentifies them as from her time in prison during suffrage. Certainly, many women did write, and did so clandestinely, while imprisoned during the suffrage movement. Katie Gliddon kept a prison diary in the white space of an Oxford edition of Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley she kept hidden in her cell. She was arrested in 1912 after the glass of the post office door was broken.

65 Winslow, Sylvia Pankhurst, 2.
her diary, she jokes that the WSPU had relocated to the Holloway Prison, so many of them had been detained.\textsuperscript{66} She reports that she cooperated with a guard’s order because she hoped that she would be able to get some art supplies as Sylvia Pankhurst had during her imprisonment.

Pankhurst’s imprisonment in 1921 apparently did not include any such favors, however. Her book of poems, \textit{Writ on a Cold Slate}, portrayed a prison where prisoners were not allowed to record their experiences except “on a cold slate, and swiftly washed away.”\textsuperscript{67} In defiance of this, however, she managed to record poems on toilet paper and smuggle them out. She wrote many poems about her fellow prisoners, most of whom were poor, working class women. Pankhurst was interested in representations of working, poor women during her time in the suffrage movement, as an art student and a writer. She wrote and illustrated a series of articles about women’s prisons for \textit{Pall Mall Magazine} and WSPU’s newspaper, \textit{The Vote}.\textsuperscript{68} In 1907, she travelled to Northern England and Scotland, drawing women working in industry, pit brow women working in the coal industry, and women working in china workshops.\textsuperscript{69} These immersions in the life of working women have ties to earlier twentieth- and late nineteenth-century movement in which women of higher classes concerned themselves with poor and working class life. Ellen Ross writes in her introduction to \textit{Slum Travelers: Ladies and London Poverty}, “these generations of women at work in London were full participants in the global wanderings of the British middle classes of their time.”\textsuperscript{70} She explains, “Metropolitan and imperial destinations were closely linked for these late Victorians and Edwardians.”\textsuperscript{71} This connection might help to contextualize Pankhurst’s movements from suffrage and socialist

\textsuperscript{66} Gliddon, “Prison Diary.”
\textsuperscript{67} Pankhurst, \textit{Writ on Cold Slate. [Poems.]}, 5.
\textsuperscript{68} Pankhurst and Pankhurst, \textit{Sylvia Pankhurst, Artist and Crusader}, 70.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 80.
\textsuperscript{70} Ross, \textit{Slum Travelers}, 26.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.
reform movements of her parents’ generation to working class suffrage and post-revolution socialism to her anticolonial politics in the 1920s to anti-fascist Ethiopian nationalism in the 1930s. As Barbara Winslow has noted, “many are surprised that, as an avowed socialist and republican, Pankhurst’s final political activities included embracing the reactionary emperor Haile Selassie.”

The form she used to write poetry also indicates a through line from nineteenth century reform movements to her twentieth century transnational modernist sites she created in her publications. The poems she wrote about the poor women imprisoned with her in Holloway Prison, and wrote articles on them after her release. The poems are reminiscent of the illustrations and stories she wrote for suffrage publications many years previous. The social realist, reform-oriented documentary impulse in these projects, as well as the conventional blank verse form of the poetry, puts Pankhurst in a clear line of aesthetics with nineteenth-century reformers and radicals. I picture Pankhurst as link between the previous radical moment of the nineteenth century, and the burgeoning twentieth century, modernist iterations of internationalism, feminism, and anti-imperialism. Her literary practices are consistent with this. Like the nineteenth century reformists and radicals of her parents’ generation, she believed in the importance of art and culture in making political change. Her literary and visual work references Arts & Crafts figures like William Morris and Walter Crane. She used traditional, conservative forms of poetry that followed conventional patterns of scansion, such as the iambic pentameter of sonnets and blank verse. But like other modernists, Pankhurst engaged questions of aesthetics and politics in her own work, and in the work she featured in her publications.

The daily experience of working women was an interest that ran through much of

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73 The Workers’ Dreadnought, May 28 and June 11, 1921.
Pankhurst’s work in the 1920s. Her fiction imagined how daily, domestic life and romantic relationships would change when society was transformed. Her short story “Co-operative Housekeeping” depicted communal domestic arrangement in which children were raised collectively, and machines took over tedious daily labor like dishwashing and sweeping. She also focused on the lives of women to highlight the contrast between life in a communist versus a capitalist state. Her pamphlet, “Housing and the Workers’ Revolution: Housing in Capitalist Britain and Bolshevik Russia,” described the life of a housewife in Wales, and contrasted the state of things in Britain with the rapid changes happening in women’s lives in the Soviet Union. She draws attention to the unpaid labor done by women in capitalist societies, and the insufficient living conditions of the poor. In Britain, life of women is marked by war, dejection, poverty:

Two women are sadly condoling together. She with the strange, stunned look murmurs:

“My two sons were killed within a month.” The Labour Party election posters are still on the walls, appealing to her to “Vote for the men and women who gave” her “victory.”

Where is her victory?

The blight of poverty is everywhere. Here and there cheap little cotton flags, the Union Jack and the colours of the Allies, are hung from a window or clothesline across the street, to welcome some returning soldier. They trail crimi and limp, serving to emphasise the general dejection.

The poverty of postwar Britain shows women, mothers, whose children were killed in a pointless war, disillusioned with the patriotic spectacle. The “cheap little cotton flags,” meant to celebrate the nation’s victory, instead betray “the general dejection” of the common people. In contrast

75 Pankhurst, *Housing & the Workers’ Revolution*. 
with this scene of Britain, Pankhurst presents a Soviet society where the state and the people work together. In the Soviet Union, “the land belongs to the whole people.”

Pankhurst also focuses on changes in daily life in her pamphlet *The Soviet Union as I Saw It*, also published by the Dreadnought Press, and serialized in the *Workers’ Dreadnought* during her imprisonment. She writes about new communal living configurations—a house for mothers and children, babies’ homes, and clinics. She also writes about the “marriage relation” and reports on how it changed with the revolution. The imperative to marry is lifted, she tells her readers, but nevertheless:

Most Russian Communists do not desire to accelerate the substitutions of free unions for the legal marriage ties, lest persons of irresponsible temperament be encouraged to foolish excesses. Propaganda for the free unions is carried on mainly amongst women's sections of the Party, and largely in order to allay the anxiety of women worried by the spread of new ideas.

Pankhurst observes social change in action in the Soviet Union. She notes the uneven adoption of new freedoms and difficulty in transforming relationships and gender norms. Pankhurst explored this interest in an eventual societal transition to relationships not defined through marriage, in the fiction that she published a few years later. The short stories also considered the challenges and difficulties of making such a societal change, away from a standard of lifetime commitment to monogamy.

Pankhurst published two short stories in her literary magazine *Germinal*. They were attributed to “Richard Marsden,” which Richard Price has noted is a pseudonym for Pankhurst.

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76 Ibid.
77 *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, beginning on April 7, 1921.
78 Pankhurst, *Soviet Russia as I Saw It*. 
taken from her father’s name. The stories were works of speculative fiction set in a future world in which household labor and family configurations had been transformed by revolutionary change—the themes Pankhurst celebrated in her earlier work on collective housing and the Soviet Union. The stories envision a future where technological advances relieve women of domestic drudgery. In “Utopian Conversations,” from the first issue of Germinal, Gilgal’s bath was “already filling with warm water, in response to her touch on the electric button.” She consults her “calendar remembrancer” that tells her that it is her day to work on the upkeep of the roads. She uses a “motor road-sweeper and sprinkler” for the task. Dirty breakfast dishes travel on “wheeled tiers of trays that were rushed into the scullery, where the water hoses played upon it till it was clean, and then the hot air, and so it was left all ready for use later on.” It is also a world of abundance. Gilgal follows her morning street cleaning duty with a breakfast of grilled vegetables and fruits collectively shared among the community. Everyone eats their fill. It also seems to be a world where racial and colonial conflicts don’t exist; however, this may be because there is little racial or regional difference represented. The descriptions of the main characters emphasize their whiteness. Gilgal’s “skin was like cream, with the blush of the wild rose in it.” David is “as fair and strong as a young god.” Martha “was white as milk, and her lips were red and full.”

Pankhurst’s stories both devote space to describing the forms of sexual and romantic relationships in this new society. Men do not treat women as property. The stories include positive, if unsubtle, descriptions of sexual pleasure: “the sweet waters of love ran through them

79 Price, Sylvia Pankhurst’s Germinal. Her use of her father’s name also resonates with the strong identification with her father apparent in Jane Marcus’s characterization of Sylvia’s narrative of her split with the WSPU in The Suffrage Movement as “Christabel and Emmeline appear as isolated man-haters and hysterics and are robbed of political genius as Sylvia concludes with their ‘tragic betrayal’ of her father’s principles.” (Marcus, Suffrage and the Pankhurts, 6.)
80 Germinal, Vol. 1 No. 1, no page numbers.
with moving thrills, and over them passed the waves of passion.”\textsuperscript{81} The stories make didactically clear that monogamy will no longer be customary in this ideal future. Martha becomes jealous of David and Gilgal’s relationship. David responds, “you are like the people of old time, who wanted to cage their lovers? Should I love you the less for loving Gilgal?”\textsuperscript{82} Martha and David become trapped in the jealousy and unhappiness that is shown to stem from monogamy. Gilgal, the heroine of the story, leaves them and their problems behind, however. She sets out on her own. On her journey, she meets a man who explains another example of a patriarchal convention that has changed. He tells Gilgal, “we are a close sort of people about here, and keep to our family names a good deal: it’s just our custom. Some people take the father’s family name, some the mother’s, and some use them both; but that is very cumbrous.”\textsuperscript{83}

“The Pageant,” published in the second issue of \textit{Germinal}, also uses comparisons to the past to demonstrate the improvements of this future world. The story reflects upon the purpose of art, and work:

You say we are happier than the people of old days; but they were not so much tempted to work for mere fame or to torture themselves by striving after unattainable excellence. They worked for a means of livelihood and their ambition was the modest one of producing something that others would buy…We are free to do as we please with our lives.\textsuperscript{84}

The story takes place on midsummer, as the village prepares for the pageant of the title, painting murals, and rehearsing poetry. The day is a celebration of the year’s achievements, as well as the “anniversary of liberation.” However, we learn, “Only Iris and Numa were sad.” Numa had

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid.\textsuperscript{.}
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.\textsuperscript{.}
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid.\textsuperscript{.}
\textsuperscript{84} \textit{Germinal}, Vol. 1, No. 2, 5.
sculpted a piece called “Survival of the Fittest,” which depicted a violent struggle between two figures, one “low-browed and apish” and another “still more apish.” He becomes depressed because it departs from the pleasure of his first sculpture, an imagined home for Iris, and the sculpture of his mentor, which depicts a mother teaching a child to read. It seemed “a rebuke to his own crude conception of human progress.” Iris and Numa find “a rusty box of the sort that was called a safe in the days of money.” Numa assesses the safe, “Yes it is old—and ugly—early twentieth century—a wretched production artistically, but it has proved durable enough.” Within it, they find a diary. Iris prompts Numa, “Then you will be able to see whether you would really prefer to be back in those days.” The diary tells a story of a man who is unable to marry Daisy, the woman he loves, because she is poor. She marries someone else, but ends up having a child with the diarist. The child dies. The man goes abroad to the colonies to work in oil. He returns to Europe to find Daisy has killed herself. He marries again but is bored. The diary, and the economic motivation of the distress incurred, cause Numa to conclude, “we are better off than they were in those days.” Their contemporary problems seem small in comparison to the societal conditions of the twentieth century.

Despite shedding the patriarchal romance form and its propulsion toward marriage, Pankhurst upholds links between biological reproduction and motherhood with positive futurity. “The Pageant” ends with Numa resolving to have a child with Iris, a creation “more important than all of the arts.” In “Utopian Conversations,” David utters, “If you should have a baby,

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85 Ibid., 1.
86 Ibid., 4.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid., 5.
90 Ibid., 5.
Gilgal,” a statement met with “waves of joy and passion […] deep with tears.” Reproduction is not linked to the nuclear family structure, nor monogamous sexual relations—instead, Pankhurst describes foundational biological reproduction outside of that notion of patriarchal capitalism.

Pankhurst’s own biological reproduction was the source of some public discussion in 1927, when she had her son, Richard, with the Italian anarchist Silvio Corio, without being married. She composed romantic poems about the bond between mother and child, consistent with the flowery descriptions of conception and motherhood in her short stories. Her papers in the International Institute for Social History include several versions of “before the child was born it knew its mother,” and other poems on pregnancy. But, also, her unwed status came under public scrutiny in the press. She defended herself in print against those who attacked her for having a child out of wedlock. In her surveillance file, state agents made crude remarks about her son, demonstrating the disciplining rhetoric that links the capitalist state and control of women’s reproduction. In 1928, the Metropolitan Police reported in her file, “I doubt Sylvia Pankhurst being worth further enquiry at present. She will be occupied with her ‘Labour-Messiah’ baby for some time.” And, decades later, on the question of travel to Ethiopia, “The Foreign Office, whom we have consulted, take the line that Sylvia Pankhurst should be allowed to go, but they see no reason why her illegitimate son should accompany her.”

Pankhurst’s writing and publishing projects, whether fiction, poetry, newspapers, magazines, or memoirs, tend toward the creation of a utopian space to foster new modes of living and relationship. In The Workers’ Dreadnought, she imagined new configurations of domestic society and international relation, with diagrams of soviet systems and primers in Esperanto (the

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91 Germinal, Vol. 1, No. 1.
92 Winslow, Sylvia Pankhurst, 188.
94 Metropolitan Police, Special Branch, “Sylvia Pankhurst: Record File.”
universal language invented in the late nineteenth century of which Pankhurst was a strong proponent). She also used fiction and poetry in her project of creating a new world in print. In the 1920s, Pankhurst wanted to change the dynamic between publication and audience, writer and reader. Her paper advertised "Revolutionary News a Speciality," and she conceived of art and writing as radical acts. A few years later, when she founded the literary magazine *Germinal*, she articulated its purpose “to bring art into contact with daily life and to use it as a means of expressing modern ideas and aspirations.”

Pankhurst’s biographer Barbara Winslow notes that as Pankhurst became distanced politically, literature became more central to her activities. However, it would be a mistake to imagine that literature was previously isolated from politics for Pankhurst. As early as 1921, after her release from prison, Pankhurst planned to bring out *Germinal*, and was soliciting subscriptions for the magazine in advertisements in *The Workers’ Dreadnought*.

*Germinal* only ran for two issues starting in 1923, and featured short stories, poetry, essays, book reviews, a play, and numerous illustrations. *Germinal* took a revolutionary, anti-racist, anti-imperialist stance. The word “Germinal” is the first month of spring in the French Republican calendar, derived from the Latin *germen* or seed. *Germinal* is also the title of an 1885 novel by Émile Zola about a coal miner’s strike in France. The magazine’s title signaled its revolutionary commitments, and a relationship to nineteenth-century social realism and radicalism. *Germinal* paid tribute to literary figures who bridged the nineteenth and twentieth century. The magazine featured woodcut portraits of Shaw and Tagore, promised a Gorky story in every issue, and alluded to a Zola novel in its title. The magazine also looked toward the future, weaving together

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95 Advertisement on the back cover of Schmitt, *The Hungarian Revolution an Eyewitness’s Account of the First Five Days*. The volume was published by the Workers' Socialist Federation.
97 “As Pankhurst became distanced from the day-to-day struggles of the working class, her paper took on a more literary flavor.” Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, 183.
poetry and fiction by contemporary authors whose works set the stage for what is now recognized as global modernism or anti-colonial, proletarian, literature in English.

*Germinal* was published out of the *Dreadnought* offices at 152 Fleet Street. The issues were 38 and 32 pages, respectively. Each issue cost a sixpence, and in the first issue, *Germinal* advertised 3 month, 6 month, and 1 year subscriptions (anticipating a longer life than it enjoyed). The magazine also encouraged readers to join “The Germinal Circle” which promoted bringing “art into contact with daily life.” All of *Germinal’s* content was in English, though the first issue included an Esperanto primer, and several pieces were translated from German or Russian. The first issue of *Germinal* included 5 short stories, 18 poems, a benediction-like preface by Pankhurst, seven book reviews and a list of present and forthcoming contributors to the magazines. In addition, it included 20 illustrations. The second issue included three short stories, eight poems, an essay on art, a play, four book reviews, an introductory manifesto by Pankhurst, and a list of contributors. There were eight illustrations, and two ads on the last page. Ludovic Rodo, the son of the French painter Camille Pisarro, illustrated the covers and portraits of George Bernard Shaw and Tagore. He also contributed an essay on art in Montmartre. In addition to the prefaces, Pankhurst included several pieces of her own literary work: poems, and the two utopian modernist short stories.

*Germinal* took on an explicitly internationalist, anticolonial, and antiracist editorial position. The magazine presented work set in (and often by authors hailing from) the Soviet Union, Germany, India, Italy, England, France, South Africa, and the United States. In the first issue, L. A. Motler, a British anarchist who migrated to South Africa in 1921, contributed a story, “Mbongo Jim,” set in South Africa. The story featured a black, revolutionary protagonist. In the second issue, a poem by Motler, “Transvall Summer,” and Nicholas Scumiley’s poem
“The Peninsula of Somaliland,” translated from Russian, appeared on the page before “The Man Who Came Back,” a short story in English by the Bengali author S. N. Ghose. This story is particularly noteworthy, as an early example of a South Asian author writing in English and published in Britain. Two poems by “A.C.” took aim at Mussolini. The presence of these antifascist poems is likely connected to Silvio Corio, an Italian anarchist, with whom Pankhurst had a long relationship, and a child several years later. The “Critic’s Desk” section included a review of G. Heaton Nichols’ Bayete, which the reviewer described as “one of the very few South African novels written with an attempt to deal impartially with the white and black races and to show that the natives have rights and a legitimate point of view,” but objected that “nevertheless the writer would evidently regard the regaining of South Africa by its natives as a calamity.” Thus, the magazine’s anti-colonial, anti-racist position was clear. Pankhurst’s position on race and inclusion of black writers in her publications made her an exceptional editor among left British publications.

In my view, Pankhurst was in the vanguard of left publications that began to publish fiction from an international range of writers. Certainly, later in the 1920s and in the 1930s, international writers’ congresses and other publications brought diverse writers and literary modes into contact. Michael Denning reminds us that proletarian literary traditions were shared—a fact that is often obscured because “most literary histories focus on a single national tradition.” To read Germinal on its own terms is to recognize that Pankhurst’s editorial project was deliberately transnational. The proximity of stories from authors across several continents and generations in Germinal makes international, aesthetic, and political relationships apparent. Pankhurst’s magazine makes it difficult to overlook its transnational connections.

98 Germinal, Vol. 1, No. 2, 32.
99 Denning, 53
Germinal announced itself to potential advertisers as an international publication in the first issue, claiming a readership that spanned Bloomsbury and Tagore’s hometown in Bengal:

With the appearance of this, the first issue of “Germinal,” a new field is opened up, that you would do well to watch. Germinal has a public: from its inception a steady circulation was assured: its readers take a keen interest in everything that expresses Beauty, Modernity and Progress. Readers of Germinal are to be found in places as far apart as Gower street, London, and Santiniketan, India.¹⁰⁰

Pankhurst’s publications connected writers and readers across European metropoles, Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Turning our attention to Germinal may allow us to recast the landscape of modernism. Its pages demonstrate the intellectual connections between late 19th century radical writers and the anticolonial, proletarian modernists that followed. Germinal, and the Dreadnought, should also be considered as sites of early black British literature. Pankhurst’s exceptional role as a literary editor and literary writer has been very little considered, often neglected in favor of her suffrage and left political efforts. Attention to these activities would not only highlight an important thread in 1920s literary history, but also point to a line of continuity to Pankhurst’s later publication and activism work around Ethiopian anti-fascist movement in the 1930s and beyond.

Germinal was short-lived, and seems to only survive in a handful of libraries. WorldCat locates it (in several different listings, and sometimes incomplete runs) in the British Library, the National Library of Scotland, University of New South Wales Library, the New York Public Library, Northwestern University, Harvard University, and The Huntington Library.¹⁰¹ The International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam also has both issues in their collection of

¹⁰⁰ Germinal, Vol. 1, No. 1, no page numbers.
Pankhurst’s papers. The pages of *Germinal* suggest that there may be other publications yet to be identified that could develop our sense of transnational collaborations, editorial relationships, and friendships in the twentieth century. The archives of women editors would be a place to begin our search.

**STRIKE LITERATURE FOR THE SUBCONTINENT**

The Bengali author S.N. Ghose published short stories in *Germinal* and the *Workers’ Dreadnought* in 1923. Pankhurst’s publications, like many left publications at the time, included international authors who contributed not only journalism or political commentary, but also creative work. S.N. Ghose’s short story “The Man Who Came Back” (1923) takes place at the periphery of a strike in Bengal. Gopesh Babu, a devoted employee of a railway company, stands watch beside a construction site. He spends the night in a tent to guard against a thief who had been stealing electric accumulators from the construction site during the night.

A stranger appears in the middle of the night, looking like a “living skeleton” in tattered clothes, but, for some reason, Gopesh Babu doesn’t immediately call for the police when the man arrives. The unnamed man immediately admits to being the thief, but asks Gopesh Babu to reconsider his judgment of him. He explains to Gopesh Babu that he too once believed in the good of industrialization, but after traveling abroad he now rejects capitalism and its wage slavery. The man asks, “but what about the thieves that have forced us into this condition?” The man cites his experiences at universities in Tokyo and with labor unions in Chicago. He laments the limitations of the current labor and anticolonial movements in Bengal. Suddenly, a police sergeant interrupts their conversation and drags the man out of the tent. In the last moments of the story, it’s revealed that the man has committed a transgression more serious than stealing.

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102 Ghose, “The Man Who Came Back.” Author also known as Sudhindra Nath, or Sudhin N. Ghose.
lamps, and that the man and Gopesh Babu are more closely connected than their chance encounter initially suggested.

Ghose’s short story, published in *Germinal*, is an early example of Indian literary modernism in English, and one that challenges common notions of global modernism. Ghose was born in 1899 in Burdwan, Bengal to a well-off family. His father was a judge in the High Court. A tutor introduced a teenaged Ghose to socialism. After getting a Bachelor of Science from the University of Calcutta in 1920, Ghose traveled to Paris and Strasbourg for graduate school, where he eventually finished a dissertation on Gabriel Dante Rossetti in 1929. Most accounts say that he first moved to Britain in 1940, and went on to write novels and collections of folk tales in English. Several critics note the existence of his “two playlets” published in London in 1924 (though they don’t consider them seriously as texts). None of the studies mention that, in fact, Ghose lived in London for several years in the early 1920s, nor do they mention his early short stories.

Ghose is best known for the novels he published after World War II, along with collections of folklore from India and Tibet. His tetralogy of novels, *And Gazelles Leaping* (1949), *Cradle of the Clouds* (1951), *The Vermilion Boat* (1953), and *Flame of the Forest* (1955), shared a protagonist, a young boy growing up in India. Like Ghose’s early short stories, the novels present a world full of international crossings, with characters that hail from several continents. One critic counts: “a Chinese, a Siamese, a West Indian Negro, a Swedish schoolmistress, a Danish pastor, a Jew, a Goanese, a Greek, an Anglo-Indian girl and half a dozen representatives of other races along with Bangalis, Santals and men and women of other

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104 Narayan’s *Sudhin N. Ghose* and C. Vijayasree’s biographical entry, for instance, both date his move to England to 1940. Ghose’s presence in the 1920s is evident from documents in his papers in the British Library. Ghose, “Papers of Sudhindra Nath Ghose.”
provinces.\textsuperscript{105} The narratives incorporated heterogeneous sources: Sanskrit verse, Indian storytelling, myth, illustrations, musical transcription, and various Indian vernaculars. When they were published, the novels were reviewed widely and included in lists of the year’s best books in Britain and the United States. His work was translated into French, Polish, and German.\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Le Berceau des Nuages}, the French translation of \textit{Cradle of the Clouds}, won the Prix Langlois from the Academie Francaise in 1959. But Ghose did not sustain such recognition, perhaps because of his unexpected death in 1965, his reported aversion to self-promotion, or his conservative stance on Indian independence.\textsuperscript{107} Moreover, his novels may have fallen out of view because their form was misrecognized as a memoir, or else dismissed as failed realism, rather than celebrated as experimental and hybrid. The \textit{Times Literary Supplement} reviewed the four novels in their “Biography and Memoirs” section, and the National Library in Kolkata doesn’t file them as fiction.\textsuperscript{108} On the other hand, critic David McCutchion objected to the fantastical elements of Ghose’s fiction, writing, “his mind could not keep a clear hold on reality, and all is distorted and overwrought by his runaway imagination.”\textsuperscript{109} The novels were for some readers not realist enough, and for others, taken to be fact.

Ghose’s novels have some champions. Shyamala Narayan reflects that in K.R. Srinavas Iyengar’s influential \textit{Indian Writing in English}, he was “relegated to Iyengar’s chapter on ‘other novelists’” and thus overshadowed by Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, and Raja Rao, despite the

quality of his novels.\textsuperscript{110} Narayan wrote the first (and only) book-length study on Ghose. More recently, C. Vijayasree wrote of Ghose, “he is undoubtedly an important writer as one of the earliest experimentalists in Indian fiction and hence as a precursor of the new generation of Indian novelists writing today, such as Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, and Amitav Ghosh.”\textsuperscript{111} Indian novelist Anita Desai cited “Sudhin Ghose’s curious fantastic tales” as an influence on her own literary work.\textsuperscript{112} In addition to Narayan’s book, Ghose has been the focus of several book chapters and articles, and is occasionally listed in surveys of Indian writers who wrote in English in the post-independence era.\textsuperscript{113} However, none of his novels were ever republished, and his pre-World War II, pre-Independence writing is unknown. No critic mentions his short stories, published in Pankhurst’s publications; no one has read the later novels in relation to his early socialist fiction.\textsuperscript{114}

“The Man Who Came Back” and his other works from the 1920s call for new attention to be brought to Ghose. He is one of the earliest examples of a South Asian author writing fiction in English, and publishing for an international audience. His fiction predates and anticipates the

\textsuperscript{110}\textsuperscript{ Narayan, *Sudhin N. Ghose*, 10.}
\textsuperscript{111}\textsuperscript{ Vijayasree, “Sudhin N. Ghose (1899-1965),” 127.}
\textsuperscript{114}\textsuperscript{ In addition to the published plays and fiction, there are several unfinished works in Ghose’s papers at the British Library that engage with radical politics that could be brought into such a discussion.}
work of the writers most often cited as the early authors of Indian fiction in English. Like his more famous contemporary Mulk Raj Anand, Ghose represented the experience of workers in South Asia, as well as expatriates in the metropole. Ghose published fiction in Pankhurst’s East London publications several years before Anand published his first short story, “The Lost Child,” on Eric Gill’s handpress in County Buckinghamshire.\(^{115}\) Anand’s interactions with T.S. Eliot and Bloomsbury have been fairly well established within recent scholarship in modernist studies.\(^{116}\) S. N. Ghose’s literary activities in London in the 1920s have been lost not only because of Ghose’s political shifts away from socialism and anticolonial radicalism later in life, but also due to the brief life of Pankhurst’s literary magazine and Pankhurst’s own relative obscurity as a literary figure. “The Man Who Came Back” reminds us to seek out forgotten texts of anticolonial, global modernism published in radical and small magazines, and to extend the map of South Asian writing in England beyond Bloomsbury. Ghose found an international audience in London through Sylvia Pankhurst’s East London-based publications *Germinal* and the *Workers’ Dreadnought*. He also published two plays with London-based *Plays for a People’s Theatre*.\(^{117}\) His forgotten short stories and plays from the 1920s provide a significant addition to the canon of anticolonial, global modernism in English, as well as black British literature.\(^{118}\) Ghose’s writing represents an important and lost node in the history of global modernism.

“The Man Who Came Back” indexes a range of transnational issues, despite the small


\(^{117}\) *Plays for a People’s Theatre* published a numbered series of plays by authors including D.H. Lawrence, Douglas Goldring, Claude Houghton, Ralph Fox, Lilias Maccrie, Margaret MacNamara, and M.A. Arabian (with frontispiece by the artist Rita Nahabedian).

\(^{118}\) Ibid.
geographic range of setting of the story, which takes place entirely in a tent. Gopesh Babu is a head clerk at McDonald and Co., whose colonial tramway project rips up the roads, causing incessant noise and traffic problems. Gopesh Babu’s life was previously changed by another colonial project, a Geological Survey that found valuable tin in the soil of a piece of land he owned in Bihar. The tin brought money that funded his son’s studies abroad. Even the clothes Gopesh Babu and the man wear signal the international forces that impact their lives. Gopesh Babu is “dressed in a very thick Irish ulster—a garment that was never meant for the mild winters of Calcutta,” brought by a Scandinavian engineer who worked for the colonial tramway company and who mistakenly thought he would use it to ski in Darjeeling.119 In contrast, the man who came back from living abroad is dressed in tatters, a poverty that critically informs his cosmopolitan knowledge of industry and empire.

The man who has “come back” condemns neo-colonialism in a critique consistent with James Connolly’s warnings to the Irish, Anand on India, or Frantz Fanon’s later assessment of Algeria. He tells Gopesh Babu, “Look at the Nationalist papers—they cry against Imperialist injustice every day, and when it comes to their turn to give justice to the Indian workers they are the same as the English capitalists.”120 In addition, he laments that the strikers’ demands are not more radical, but understands from his time in Chicago that workers limit risk when they are providing for a family. The man who comes back is a politically sophisticated, critical observer of the world. Though the story’s realism is focalized through the trusting and ideologically conservative Gopesh Babu, this narrative viewpoint allows the more travelled man’s cynicism and critical perspective to challenge Gopesh Babu’s initial naïveté.

“The Man Who Came Back” reflects an upsurge in anticolonial activity in the first

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decades of the twentieth-century, particularly in Bengal, where both non-violent and
“revolutionary terrorist” movements took root. South Asian workers went on strike in large
numbers in 1919 and the early 1920s, protesting British colonial projects. At the beginning of
1919, textile workers went on strike in Bombay, and strikes spread throughout the subcontinent
to reach the railways. The Bengali Communist leader M.N. Roy’s described the strike’s
development in an article published in *The Workers’ Dreadnought*. Roy wrote:

> To prevent the transport of troops, the workers on the railway connecting the two
provinces struck, and began to destroy the roads, telegraph lines, stations, troop trains,
bridges etc. In a few days the strike spread all over the country, entirely tying up all
activities of public life. The whole movement soon assumed a decidedly political
character, and ended in an uprising against British rule.¹²²

“The Man Who Came Back” takes part in a global movement of proletarian fiction, and more
particularly, it creates a kind of strike story for the subcontinent.

The publication history of “The Man Who Came Back” and Ghose’s other work from this
period suggest an additional, less well-mapped modernist geography within London.
Bloomsbury is commonly thought of as the site where writers and artists from the colonies
engaged modernism. Mulk Raj Anand’s *Conversations in Bloomsbury* broadcasts the location’s
importance in its title. Sara Blair’s “Local Modernity, Global Modernism: Bloomsbury and the
Places of the Literary” describes the neighborhood as a cultural contact zone where suffragists,
reformers, students, and artists from South Asia, Africa, and Britain encountered one another.¹²³

Indeed, Ghose’s presence in residences and institutions in Bloomsbury is consistent with Blair’s

¹²¹ Sarkar, “Bengali Middle-Class Nationalism and Literature: A Study of Saratchandra’s ‘Pather Dabi’
and Rabindranath’s ‘Char Adhyay,’” 449. According to Sarkar, “Bose principally worked among urban,
educated youth, some links with industrial labor.”
¹²³ Blair, “Local Modernity, Global Modernism.”
account: he took classes in art and archeology at the University of London,124 joined the Student Movement House, and then lived in a flat on Gower Street.125 This neighborhood was also the area where McKay and Ogden spent a lot of their time. But it was East London, the location of Sylvia Pankhurst’s publications, which saw Ghose’s early fiction into print.126 East London was a different kind of contact zone within the city, a working class area whose docks attracted sailors from around the world, many of whom came from Africa, the Caribbean, and Asia. Sylvia Pankhurst’s offices in the East End, hosting writers like Ghose and McKay, suggest a site for further exploration of transnational and interracial networks of anticolonial modernism.

Ghose’s characters tend to be defeated by their circumstances. In another short story, “The Image Breaker” (1923), published in The Workers’ Dreadnought, an anarchist meets an ironic and tragic fate in a small village temple when his ammunition spontaneously explodes.127 “The Fool Next Door” (1923), also published in the Dreadnought, demonstrates the violence of colonialism: the two sons of the “Fool” suffer a gruesome death in an industrial accident, and their father becomes speechless.128 When the father, not yet become the “Fool,” asks how future accidents will be prevented, the foreign owners’ negligent response induces his insanity. The owners are “struck dumb,” then call him “an insolent dog” and merely regret that the accident has given fuel to the “the swadeshi-gangs.” Ghose’s 1920s fiction indexes the impact of migration, industrialized labor, and colonial issues—but it doesn’t offer a comfortable or comforting resolution to the problems raised.

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124 Ghose, “Papers of Sudhindra Nath Ghose.”
125 Mary Weiser mentions this in her “Sudhindra Nath Ghose: a Memoir” (c. 1999), included in the papers of Sudhindra Nath Ghose.
126 Though Pankhurst spent time in Bloomsbury during her work for the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU), which was headed by her mother and sister, Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, Sylvia split with the WSPU in 1913 and left Bloomsbury to found the working-class East London Federation of Suffragettes (ELFS).
Ghose’s fiction from the 1920s could be viewed in relation to a failed bildungsroman. All three of these stories depict relationships between fathers and sons disrupted by the forces of capitalism in a colonial context. The sons are captured, killed, and disempowered. These stories are a variation on the notion of modernist bildungsroman that Jed Esty identifies in *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development*. Esty observes bildungsroman narratives in western modernist novels, in which protagonists fail to age, and the “texts block or defer the attainment of a mature social role through plots of colonial migration and displacement.”

Ghose’s narratives go further; his characters face death and imprisonment—graver consequences than interrupted maturation. If, as Esty says, “Modernism exposes and disrupts the inherited conventions of the bildungsroman in order to criticize bourgeois values” and to challenge “mainstream developmental discourses of self, nation, and empire,” then the failed bildungsroman of S.N. Ghose suggest a much graver and more urgent critique of those values of the dominant, colonizing societies.

Ghose’s plays similarly reveal anti-capitalist and anti-colonial politics and offer ambivalent narrative conclusions. His plays were published in London by Plays for a People’s Theatre in 1924. Unlike the short stories, the plays are set in Europe and feature outsiders who have traveled to a European metropole. In *The Defaulters*, Gotam left his father’s plantation in Siam in protest of his father’s labor practices, and refused to accept money from him while in Europe. The play shows, however, that exile and self-impoverishment are not a sufficient response to colonial and capitalist exploitation. Another character, the “ex-communist” tells Gotam should have stayed and led the coolies in a revolt. But the ex-communist’s brand of

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129 Esty, *Unseasonable Youth*, 2.
130 Ibid., 3.
militant action is shown to be insufficient as well. The ex-communist sets off a bomb in an apartment building to protest the landlord’s evictions and the explosion inadvertently kills Gotam’s girlfriend. The other play, *And Pippa Dances*, ends as a revolutionary romance, appearing at first glance to be an optimistic ending, in which Pippa and “the Artist” resolve, “We will both be on the barricades when the Revolution comes.” However, this utopian resolution rings hollow, as the couple’s union is founded on Pippa’s rape. At the beginning of the scene, Pippa awakes in bed with “The Artist,” whom she first accuses of drugging her and having sex with her. He explains that his poverty led him to do so, as he cannot afford to court women. When he laments the system they live in, Pippa sympathizes with his politics, which resonate with her own critiques of nationalism and war, and they promptly decide to marry. This erasure of sexual violence in favor of a left political cause sends a chilling message—apparently unintended on the part of Ghose—about the sexual politics of the revolutionary Left depicted here.

Ghose’s politics changed in the years that followed. He spoke against immediate Indian independence during World War II, which may have contributed to his relative obscurity today. While many prominent Indian writers, including Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao, worked publicly for Indian independence at home and abroad, Ghose supported a conservative tack. He believed the British should retain some control, with India undertaking a slower transition to self-rule. In lectures during the war, he devoted himself to challenging “the systematic misrepresentation and vilification of Great Britain.” In a 1943 book review, he protested that “it is fashionable to accuse Britain of heartless ‘Imperialism,’ and such fashionable critics would do well to note that today the Provinces which constitute British India are as autonomous and as

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132 Ibid.
133 Qtd. in Open University, “Sudhindra Nath Ghose.”
self-governing as, say, Northern Ireland or as each one of the states of the United States.”

Such apologies for British rule likely hindered his literary reputation when the most influential South Asian cultural figures were also active in anti-colonial politics.

When Ghose contributed to Pankhurst’s publications in the 1920s, however, he had seemed to share politics more consistent with the anticolonial stances taken by Pankhurst and other contributors, including Claude McKay, for instance. Ghose’s stories fit into the selection she assembled in the pages of *Germinal* and *The Workers’ Dreadnought*. His characters are skeptical of the state, its laws, business interests, and landlords. The gap between Ghose’s later politics and his early radicalism is by no means unique, but it is striking. On the margin of a clipping of one of his stories published in *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, he wrote a note, reprimanding his younger self in French: “*Sotisse! Très stupide + infantile!*”

Ghose left this period of his life behind, apparently never recalling it in his personal relationships nor in print. None of the existing accounts of his life note that he lived in England in the early 1920s, and neither has his early fiction been recovered. Ghose doesn’t help Pankhurst’s literary reputation when he dismisses his stories from the 1920s as stupid and infantile. However, I propose we rescue the stories from this judgment, and take them seriously as examples of Indian fiction written in English in the first decades of the twentieth century. As stories that take on issues of capitalism, colonialism, and resistance, Ghose’s stories in the *Dreadnought* and *Germinal* illustrate the kinds of themes and formal choices that have come to define global modernism. The vignettes depict failed attempts: to fulfill a father’s expectations, to find opportunity when migrating abroad, to succeed in local industry, or to revolt against colonial authority. The plots

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135 Ghose, “Papers of Sudhindra Nath Ghose.”
refuse to fulfill the generic requirements of the romance or bildungsroman. Instead, the stories illustrate that such domestic unions (normally pro-state allegories to reign in variant subjects) and individualist fulfillment are impossible under such structures.  

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Ghose’s pessimistic narrative approach contrasts with Pankhurst’s, who described life in a utopian future in order to critique her present day. McKay’s fiction, written after his departure from London, takes a still different approach, most apparent in his 1928 novel, Banjo, which declares in its subtitle that it’s a “novel without a plot.” Like Ghose’s short stories, McKay’s Banjo demonstrates the false promises of liberal nationalism through the condition and trajectory of the lives of its characters. McKay’s cast of vagabond exiles don’t meet the tragic fates that Ghose’s characters do, but, nonetheless, their experiences demonstrate how people of color (from British and French colonies, and the United States) are exploited by industry and disenfranchised by nation.

Though McKay moved away from newspaper writing, and embedded a number of critiques about black and radical newspapers within his novels, Banjo returns to several themes about which he explored earlier in the decade in the pages of Pankhurst’s newspaper. One could point out the spatial resonance between the docks of East London and the ditch of Marseilles. Newspapers also play a recurring role in the novel. Walter Benjamin observed in Marseilles, “the black and brown proletarian bodies thrown to it by ship’s companies, according to their time tables, it exhales a stink of oil, urine, and printer’s ink. This comes from the tartar baking hard on

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136 Sommer, Foundational Fictions; Kaplan, The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture.  
137 The phrase seems to comment both on the narrative structure, and the novel’s relationship to landedness and nation, (Edwards, The Practice of Diaspora.)
the massive jaws: newspaper kiosks, lavatories, and oyster stalls.” Benjamin’s description of the city matches Banjo’s Marseilles, where Ray encounters newspaper vendors at every turn, and the “boys of the ditch” are themselves black and brown proletarian bodies who have chosen to discard the time tables and live apart from the strictures of company time. Banjo returns to themes that McKay dealt with in his journalism for the Dreadnought, like docks and sailors, military conscription, interracial sexual politics, and international solidarity. In some cases, these interests reappear in the fictional pages of newspapers of his novels. McKay returns at several points in Banjo to debate over Senegalese soldiers posted in Germany, and their speculated threat to white women—the theme of his letter to the editor published in the Dreadnought.

The Senegalese proprietor of the café—a location where the central characters (Ray, Banjo, Bugsy, Goosey, Taloufa, and others) regularly gather—reads an article from the paper La Race Negre, which was published by the Ligue de Defense de la Race Nègre in Paris, an organization that included Lamine Senghor and Garan Kouyaté. The article speaks "of forced conscription"—an issue that continued to be relevant throughout the interwar period. Ray recalls that he was in Germany at the time:

When I was going there the French black troops were in the Ruhr. A big campaign of propaganda was on against them, backed by German-Americans, negro-breaking Southerners, and your English liberals and socialists. The odd thing about that propaganda was that it said nothing about the exploitation of primitive and ignorant black conscripts to do the dirty work of one victorious civilization over another, but it was all about the sexuality of Negroes—that strange, big bug forever buzzing in the imagination.

138 Benjamin, “Marseilles,” in Benjamin et al., Walter Benjamin, 232.
of white people. Ray protests the widespread paranoia among whites around black sexuality in this comment, as McKay did in his letter to the editor of the *Daily Herald* in 1920. Ray, like McKay in 1920, also indicts the British Left for promoting racist arguments about black male sexuality and the threat to white women.

The racist responses to colonial conscripts’ presence in Europe comes up again in *Banjo*, in a discussion that also involves the medium of the newspaper. This time, Ray refers to a letter to the editor he clipped from a white newspaper. Ray saved the article for perverse reasons: "it was such an amusing revelation of civilized logic that Ray had preserved it, especially as he was in tacit agreement with the thesis while loathing the manner of its presentation." Ray turns the message of this mainstream publication against itself. The letter to the editor in the novel is an inversion of the letter to the editor that McKay published in the *Dreadnought*. The author of Ray’s clipped article argued that Senegalese men should not be used as soldiers in Europe (presumably the thesis with which Ray is in accord). The letter’s author uses as evidence for this argument recent news of a Senegalese soldier who had murdered someone in Germany. Taken out of his native land, according to the author, “Transplanté, déraciné, il est devenu un fou sanguinaire” (transplanted, deracinated, he became a bloodthirsty madman).

The letter to the editor allows any reader to reasonably imagine that they could become a writer, according to Benjamin. The letter to the editor in *Banjo*, however, presents an obstacle to its reader, even for simply remaining a reader. In the midst of a novel written in English, the anglophone reader encounters a block of text in French. Brent Edwards points out, “What is

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140 McKay, *Banjo, a Story without a Plot*, 146.
141 Ibid., 277.
startling for the English-language reader is that Banjo goes on to quote the entire editorial (nearly a page and a half in the original edition) in French, with no translation or summary. Edwards identifies this passage as “Banjo’s stark performance of linguistic difference.” Rather than the letter to the editor allowing any reader to imagine themselves as a writer, then, this newspaper clipping embodies an obstacle to transnational communication.

McKay’s insistence on linguistic difference in this passage of Banjo stands in contrast with Pankhurst’s investment in a universal language, evidenced in the Esperanto primers in the pages of the Dreadnought, and her lecture Delphos, which she published as a book. That Banjo’s letter is not translated or glossed for the non-francophone reader, underlines the novels’ politics of local particularity, refusing a politics that might occlude cultural differences in favor of embracing a utopian future. McKay remains in an untranslatable present.

Throughout the decade, McKay wrote about socialism, nationalism, and organized politics, docklands, sexuality, and colonial and global economies. In the early 1920s, McKay used the newspaper to make public interventions. By the time he writes Banjo, “a novel without a plot,” he uses experimental forms in fiction to explore the limits of “imagined community.”

The history of Claude McKay’s time at the Dreadnought provides another layer to an already complex author. Rather than allow McKay’s account in A Long Way from Home to dissuade us from considering this time in his career, I propose that we read the newspaper articles, poems, and letters he published in the Dreadnought on their own terms. The links between them suggest some important through lines across the literary forms McKay undertook in the 1920s, as well as some important transformations in his thinking.

Sylvia Pankhurst’s 1920s publications ought to be recovered as sites of transnational

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143 Ibid., 213.
144 Ibid., 215.
modernism. At a time when a number of publications on the Left in Britain were beginning to publish international writers, Pankhurst was exceptional for publishing what can today be thought of as an emergent movement of black British literature. The *Dreadnought* and *Germinal* published black authors’ journalism, poetry, and fiction, and took an explicitly antiracist editorial stance. Claude McKay and S.N. Ghose were each educated in a British colonial system, and each migrated, at least briefly, to England. Though they each moved away from the socialist politics that informed their respective contributions to Pankhurst’s publications, their writing from this time, and the venue of its publication, does not need to be discarded.
CHAPTER TWO
Postcards from Spain: Langston Hughes, Women Activists, and the Spanish Civil War

A NOTE FROM SPAIN
Addressed to Alabama

Lincoln Battalion
International Brigades,
Valencia on leave, 1937

Dear Sis:

I want to tell you
How these Spanish folks treat me.
Looks like, of what they got
Ain't nothin' too good for me.

When I get my two days leave
And shove off into town,
Seems like the Spanish people's
All glad to have me around.
They shake my hand.
They buy me drinks.
They pat me on the back.
Looks like they don't care nothin'
About a man bein' black.

I wonder why it is at home
In the land of the brave and free,
So many white Americans
Act so bad to me?

Sis, try to make things better, hear?
Join the workin' class.
Poor whites and blacks together
Could make a new age come to pass!

Tell Buddy to join the C.I.O.
(He couldn't join the A.F. of L.)
Tell him to join the C.I.O.
And give them bosses hell.

Sis, tell all the people
What Spain has taught to me:
Bow down and get your backsides kicked—

Or stand up and be free!

I want to be free!

Salud!

Johnny¹

“THIS POSTCARD FROM SPAIN”

Langston Hughes sent a copy of “A Note from Spain” to the British poet and journalist Nancy Cunard while he was in Spain reporting on the Spanish Civil War for the *Baltimore Afro-American*. “A Note from Spain” was the last in a series of four epistolary poems, all written in the form of a letter from “Johnny,” addressed to various “folks at home” in Alabama. The war in Spain broke out when Franco launched a coup from Spanish Morocco, in the summer of 1936. Though Britain, France, the U.S. and other nations cited the League of Nations non-intervention pact and refused to support the Republican government, and overlooked Germany and Italy’s aid to Franco, thousands of individuals came to aid Republican Spain, volunteering to serve as soldiers, ambulance drivers, doctors, and nurses. In the fall of 1936, with support and oversight of the Soviet Union, volunteers were organized in the International Brigades. The Abraham Lincoln Battalion included many of the volunteers from the United States, including a number of

¹ Hughes, Cunard, and Patterson, *Poetry, Politics, and Friendship in the Spanish Civil War*, 40–43.
the African American volunteers (of whom there were between 80 and 100). Johnny, the speaker in Hughes’s series of epistolary poems, is a volunteer soldier in the Abraham Lincoln Battalion. He writes home to Alabama to describe Republican Spain as a place free of racial prejudice, and therefore relevant an important and relevant cause for African Americans to support. All four poems link the war against fascism in Spain with the struggles against racism in the United States.

Hughes titled the typescript he sent Cunard “Johnny Writes Home from Spain,” and dated it, “Madrid-Quinto-Valencia, 1937.” The three other poems in the series—“Postcard from Madrid,” “Letter from Spain,” and “Love Letter from Spain”—were all published during the war in publications like The Daily Worker, Volunteer for Liberty, and The New Times and Ethiopia News. “A Note from Spain,” however, seems to have survived relatively unnoticed in the papers of Nancy Cunard. Until now, scholars have overlooked Hughes’s efforts to mark women’s activism within the Spanish Civil War because of the absence of “A Note from Spain” in the canon of Hughes’s work.

“A Note from Spain” provides an opening through which we can consider Hughes’s Spanish Civil War politics and poetics as feminist, in addition to his more well-established black internationalist commitments. Hughes addressed the poem to “Sis,” mailed it to Cunard and the African American organizer Louise Thompson, and the poem survived in Cunard’s papers. Moreover, the poem addresses Sis as an organizer, encouraging her to take public action on

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2 Today, American volunteers who went to Spain are commonly referred to as part of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, though during the war the Abraham Lincoln Battalion was part of the Fifteenth Brigade, and only one of the battalions in which Americans served. (“Abraham Lincoln Brigade: Spanish Civil War History and Education: FAQs.”).

3“Nancy Cunard Collection.”. I published “A Note from Spain” in 2012 in Poetry, Politics, and Friendship in the Spanish Civil War.
behalf of Spain.\textsuperscript{4} I count the performance of gender politics within war discourse among Hughes’s most important cultural interventions.\textsuperscript{5} By recuperating texts and correspondence from the papers of women like Cunard and Thompson, we recover a feminist archive within the literary and activist history of the Spanish Civil War and anti-racism in the 1930s. Women soldiers, nurses, and reporters played prominent and unprecedented roles in the Spanish Civil War. Women played significant roles in the activist networks that Hughes contributed to as he moved through Spain, Paris, and the United States. He participated in friendships and collaborations with women that have been little-discussed in either Spanish Civil War studies or histories of the African American Left, with some notable exceptions like Erik McDuffie’s recent \textit{Sojourning for Truth: Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism}. Cunard, Thompson, the social worker and labor activist Thyra Edwards, and the nurse Salaria Kee feature in Hughes’s writing about and travels in Spain during the civil war. The manuscripts and letters that reside in their archives, and Hughes’s own papers, make clear the role of women in the life of his poetry. These sometimes unpublished and forgotten works comprise a rich set of texts that display the ways Hughes expanded representations of gender in 1930s proletarian literature, changing the way we think of both Hughes's writing in the thirties, and radical Popular Front writing more generally.

Before Hughes traveled to Spain in the summer of 1937, he put together a manuscript of poetry to be published by the International Workers’ Order, titled “A New Song.” Louise Thompson was the National Secretary for the English section of the International Workers Order, the highest ranking black woman in the organization, and the only woman and the only person of

\textsuperscript{4} Louise Thompson would later be Louise Thompson Patterson. Because she hadn’t yet married William Patterson during the Spanish Civil War, I will refer to her throughout the paper as Louise Thompson.

\textsuperscript{5} This attention is not limited to the context of the Spanish Civil War. During World War II, the Korean and Vietnam wars, he wrote poetry that explored the experiences of women.
color on its National Executive Committee. She facilitated the collection’s publication. As Hughes remarked to their mutual friend Matt Crawford, “Lou’s IWO is going to bring out my proletarian poems in a booklet to sell for a dime or less. Isn’t that swell?” Hughes submitted the manuscript before he left for Spain, but it wasn’t published until after his return to the United States in 1938. In a letter that Hughes wrote to Thompson while he was in Spain, he asks about its progress and suggests some poems that might be added to the collection, including one that seems likely to be “A Note from Spain”:

Dear Lou,

What about that book of mine the I.W.O. is bringing out ? ? ? If it isn’t published yet, why not add to it this POST CARD FROM MADRID, [etc.] also MADRID, 1937 and ROAR, CHINA? Also, if you like, and know anybody with a magazine like you-all have, that might want to publish this POSTCARD kindly let them have it. [*] It hasn’t been submitted anywhere yet. I just wrote it following today’s nice little shelling---which was something!

Sincerely yours very truly,

Lang

Langston Hughes

[*] P.S. It’s a companion piece to SISTER JOHNSON MARCHES. I might do a whole series.

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6 McDuffie, Sojourning for Freedom, 105, 110.
7 Hughes, “Correspondence, Hughes to Matt Crawford.”
8 Hughes, Cunard, and Patterson, Poetry, Politics, and Friendship in the Spanish Civil War, 31–32, 34, 38.
Marques del Duero 7,
Madrid, Spain.⁹

His postscript links an unspecified epistolary poem (“this POSTCARD”) to the poem “Sister Johnson Marches.” “Sister Johnson Marches” features an outspoken African-American working-class woman activist taking part in a May Day march. It was already included in the manuscript for *A New Song*, and Hughes had published it before leaving for Europe in the May 1937 issue of *Fight Against War and Fascism*.¹⁰ “Sister Johnson Marches” positions a black vernacular speaker, a woman, as the voice of the organized working class, and, by site of publication, a voice against fascism. In *Fight Against War and Fascism*, the poem appeared in a text box at the bottom of the page, surrounded by an article about lynching, beside a section titled “American Fascism.”¹¹ The poem takes the form of a conversation between Sister Johnson and an uninitiated observer of the May Day demonstration. The poem’s dialogic form, like the epistolary form of “A Note from Spain,” makes the social function of poetry explicit. When Sister Johnson's interlocutor asks “*Who are all them people/ Marching in a mass?*” Johnson responds, “Lawd! Don't you know?/ That's de working class!”¹² Hughes says in his note to Thompson that he intends to do a “whole series,” which—if my hypothesis is right that the poem that he sent Thompson was “A Note from Spain”—would indicate a deliberate intention to represent black working-class women activists. However, neither “A Note from Spain” nor any of the other poems he suggested in this letter made it into *A New Song*, and it doesn’t seem that

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⁹ Ibid., 32.
¹¹ American League Against War and Fascism, “Fight against War and Fascism.,” May 1937.
¹² Ibid.
“A Note from Spain” made it into the pages of any magazine at the time, either, as Hughes suggested. This tantalizing postscript points to an unrealized version of *A New Song* that would have made Hughes’s attention to black women activists apparent, shifting our contemporary understanding of Hughes’s late 1930s work.

“A Note from Spain” is noteworthy not only because it completes the well-known series of epistolary poems from Johnny, but also because it hails a woman as an activist and potential spokesperson. In contrast with the masculinist poetics and enplotment typically associated with 1930s revolutionary literature, Hughes represents the agency of women activists. In “A Note from Spain,” Johnny hails Sis as a potential spokesperson for internationalism. When Johnny writes to Sis, he asks her to take action: “Sis, try to make things better, hear?” He appeals to her as a worker: “Join the workin' class.” This directive alludes to the links between the labor movement and Southern antiracist struggles, as well as the role of women in that organizing. The references to the labor movement also place “A Note from Spain” and its woman protagonist firmly within the canon of what are considered Hughes’s revolutionary, proletarian works. Johnny endorses an interracial workers movement as a vehicle for liberation, declaring, “poor whites and blacks together/ can make a new age come to pass.” Many of Hughes's poems from this period endorse an interracial working class movement. For instance, “Air Raid over Harlem” (a poem that links the Italo-Ethiopian war to racist violence in the United States) concludes with a call for “black and white workers united as one.” “A Note from Spain” extends and innovates on the themes prominent in other works from this period in Hughes’s writing.

Critics recognize Langston Hughes as an important proletarian writer of the 1930s, but his work from this period is usually praised for its treatment of race and class, without attention

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14 Hughes, *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes,* 185. “Air Raid over Harlem” anticipates several themes and formal strategies of Hughes’s Spanish Civil War poetry.
paid to gender. Critics have recognized Hughes as attentive to gender and exceptional in his use of women’s voices, but in his work from other decades, not in his 1930s work. Recovering 1930s texts by Hughes that feature women’s voices crucially expands our understanding of Hughes’s revolutionary and proletarian writing as well as our understanding of radical writing of the era more broadly. James Smethurst has characterized Hughes’s writing in the 1930s as typically masculinist, fixed on images of male bodies and workers, which Smethurst contrasts with his treatment of women in other parts of his career:

Even Langston Hughes, who often used female subjects to figure the black folk in the 1920s and in the 1940s, published few poems in the 1930s using such subjects. This is especially true of the Hughes poems printed in Left journals and under Left imprints, such as his 1938 collection, *A New Song*, published by the IWO. Instead, Hughes’s poems of the 1930s are almost always explicitly or implicitly in a male voice and often addressed directly to a male listener.

According to Smethurst’s account here, Hughes begins to include women’s voices again in the early 1940s “after a hiatus of using such voices during the 1930s.” But “A Note from Spain” and the letter to Thompson that proposes “a whole series” on black women active in the labor movement suggest a different reading. Hughes continued to use women’s voices in his poetry and hail women among his readers in his 1930s poetry. That interpellation is most explicit in the

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18 Ibid., 58.
salutation “Dear Sis.” The fact that these poems were not published may indicate a bias among Left publications at the time, but the recovery of poems like “A Note from Spain” allows us to reconsider Hughes’s political poetry today. In contrast with most men authors on the Left in the 1930s, Hughes gave space to voices of women activists in his poetry.

“A Note from Spain” hails a working class woman activist as a force in antifascist struggle. Johnny prompts Sis to be outspoken, and this appeal to speech and action is a significant intervention. Black feminists in decades following, like the authors of the Combahee River Collective’s *Black Feminist Statement*, protested the strong silencing they learned, “for example, when we were told in the same breath to be quiet both for the sake of being ‘ladylike’ and to make us less objectionable in the eyes of white people.”

In contrast to such messaging, a number of Hughes’s poems (and plays, like *Harvest* and *Don’t You Want to be Free?*) posit women characters that speak out and organize. Johnny asks Sis to pass on a number of messages on his behalf. He requests that she “Tell Buddy to join the C.I.O.” and then become a spokesperson. Johnny charges, “Sis, tell all the people/ What Spain has taught to me.”

“HER COMRADE SHOES”

The real-life women that Hughes worked with and met in Spain exceeded the role that Johnny encourages Sis to take up in “A Note from Spain.” Nancy Cunard was in Spain within the month of the nationalist coup against the Republican government in July 1936. She wrote to Hughes that same month, describing her experiences in Spain and planning poetry projects. Hughes had been in contact with the Cunard since earlier in the decade when she compiled her massive anthology, *Negro* (1934). When she arrived in Spain in 1936, she was planning another

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anthology project, “a new collection of Negro writings,” which in the end she didn’t complete.\textsuperscript{21}

In her early letters to Hughes from Spain, she gave feedback on poetry and plays he’d sent her, and asked after poets including Nicolas Guillén and Jacques Roumain. On the 23\textsuperscript{rd} of July 1936, Hughes wrote to Richard Wright, mentioning that Cunard asked him for names of “revolutionary Negro poets.” He added, “I sort of wish I was in Spain to see all of the excitement.”\textsuperscript{22}

Hughes was no stranger to antifascist organizing. He was involved in campaigns around the Scottsboro case in Alabama and the defense of Angelo Herndon. Hughes wrote poems on fascist aggressions in Ethiopia, China, and Czechoslovakia.\textsuperscript{23} By the start of 1937, he had helped to form the American Writers and Artists Ambulance Corps for Spain.\textsuperscript{24} Hughes wrote to Crawford on February 1, 1937, “Today is my birthday so I’m sending you a poem on Spain just finished an hour ago.”\textsuperscript{25} Later in the spring, Cunard wrote to Hughes to request a poem for a pamphlet series she created with Pablo Neruda, \textit{Les Poètes du Monde Défendent le Peuple Espagnol} (The Poets of the World Defend the Spanish People). It seems likely the poem Hughes sent Cunard for the pamphlet, “Song of Spain,” was the same one Hughes sent to Crawford on February 1\textsuperscript{st}. The version in the \textit{Poètes du Monde} pamphlet is dated January 1937.\textsuperscript{26} Cunard wrote that they thought of Hughes “most particularly as the one in America that will make such a poem, from the heart and from the revolutionary angle.”\textsuperscript{27} Hughes’s “Song of Spain,” invited workers to “see themselves as Spain” and take on the struggle for Spain as a part of an interracial workers’ movement. Cunard and Neruda published the poem in one of their pamphlets, paired

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 13.
\item\textsuperscript{22} Hughes, “Correspondence with Richard Wright.”
\item\textsuperscript{23} Hughes, \textit{The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes}.
\item\textsuperscript{24} Dolinar, \textit{The Black Cultural Front Black Writers and Artists of the Depression Generation}, 86.
\item\textsuperscript{25} Hughes, “Correspondence, Hughes to Matt Crawford.”
\item\textsuperscript{26} García Lorca and Hughes, \textit{Deux poèmes}.
\item\textsuperscript{27} Hughes, Cunard, and Patterson, \textit{Poetry, Politics, and Friendship in the Spanish Civil War}, 18.
\end{itemize}
with Federico García Lorca’s poem “Soneto a Carmela Cóndon.”

When Cunard received “Song of Spain,” she replied on a postcard of Francisco Goya’s painting La Maja Desnuda (The Naked Maja) from the Prado Museum in Madrid, a painting Hughes names in the poem. Cunard circled the caption identifying the painting on the back of the postcard and declared with an arrow “I found her just after your poem came.” That Cunard located this postcard during wartime suggests an act of intrepid investigation. I imagine Cunard searching in markets, sifting through postcards to locate this image. La Maja Desnuda was no longer in the Prado; Republicans had sent it, along with many other paintings, by truck to Valencia to protect the collection from bombings. While Cunard greets the maja figure with joy, Hughes’s poem is not so celebratory. Hughes’s poem is dialogic: One speaker states that “La Maja Desnuda,” along with a series of other cultural artifacts and traditions, is “the song of Spain.” The second speaker corrects the first: “Toros, flamenco, paintings, books—Not Spain./ The people are Spain:/ The people beneath that bombing plane.”

The second speaker asserts a Spain that is alive, collective, and imperiled. Historically, the maja’s costume (when clothed) imitated aristocratic dress and challenged hierarchy at the turn of the nineteenth century, but Hughes’s poem trades on the later meaning of majismo, a nostalgic symbol prevalent in Spanish tourism and advertising. In the many poems and articles Hughes went on to write during the

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28 García Lorca and Hughes, Deux poèmes.
29 Hughes, Cunard, and Patterson, Poetry, Politics, and Friendship in the Spanish Civil War, 21.
30 Madrid was a crucially contested city during the war. Republican propaganda took up the rescue of art from the Prado enthusiastically. The public coverage was meant to refute accounts of Republican desecration, and depict them as protectors of humanism. Stephen Spender wrote about the Prado rescue, and other efforts to collect “all the lesser works of art from the palaces and churches of Madrid” (Val Cunningham, Penguin Book of Spanish Civil War Verse). In October 1936, the photographer Chim devoted a significant amount of film to a series on the rescue of art from the Descalzas Monastery in Madrid that was published in Regards (Chim exhibit, Spring 2013, International Center for Photography).
31 García Lorca and Hughes, Deux poèmes.
Spanish Civil War, Hughes extended his insistence on representations of empowered people. The women he wrote about were not reclining women, like the woman in Goya’s painting, passive victims of war nor passive participants in the making of art, images circulated on postcards. They planted their feet on stepladders and spoke. In poems, Hughes positioned women as activists, agents in social organizing. And in life, the women he interacted with exceeded the everyday activism he describes in his poetry. They acted in the service of politically-committed art and poetry, and documented the history of the internationalist activism and publishing they created.

Originally, Hughes planned to spend the summer of 1937 leading a tour group in Europe with a company called Edutravel. The pamphlet for the trip advertised Hughes as the leader of a tour that would focus on national minorities in Europe and the Soviet Union. Thyra Edwards had led a similar tour the previous year, taking an interracial group of 23 people to the U.K., Scandinavia, and the Soviet Union. Hughes wrote to Crawford in February and referred to their 1932 trip to the Soviet Union to make the never-realized film Black and White, which Hughes and Crawford both attended, and Louise Thompson led:

If anybody wants to go to Russia this summer tell them to go with me, as it seems I’m conducting a tour for Edutravel sailing July 1st for eight weeks: London, Scandinavia, Russia, Poland, Paris, and home. $500 bucks. White and colored. I’m to be the leader, so I’ve written Louise and asked her where she found her comrade shoes. I’ll probably need a pair.

In Hughes’s planned Edutravel tour, and the publications of “Sister Johnson Marches” and the short story “Tain’t So” in the May issue of Fight Against War and Fascism provide insight into

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33 Edutravel pamphlet included in Gumby, Scrapbook on Langston Hughes. The tour was to include stops in London, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Helsingfors, Leningrad, Moscow, Rostov, Mineralnye-Vody, Kislovodsk, Ordzhonikidze, Tsei, Shovi, Kutais, Batum, Sochi, Kharkov, Kiev, Shepetovka, and Paris.
35 Hughes, “Correspondence, Hughes to Matt Crawford.”
Hughes’s political orientation at this time leading up to his departure to Spain. Although neither the trip, the poem, nor the short story explicitly deal with the Spanish Civil War, they each indicate the kind of concerns Hughes brought with him when he traveled to Spain later in the year. As Hughes tries on Louise Thompson’s comrade shoes, he directs his attention to racial and national minorities, women activists, and interracial internationalism.

When the Edutravel tour didn’t pan out, Hughes arranged to report on the war in Spain for the *Baltimore Afro-American*. He went first to Paris where he gave the speech “Too Much of Race” at the Second International Writers’ Congress. Standing in front of an audience of mostly European intellectuals, Hughes positions himself as an intermediary, urging that struggles against fascism and racism should be tackled together. In the course of the speech, Hughes invokes a “we” that expands its scope from a specific, racial "we" at the start to an internationalist, antifascist "we" that he extends to include all of his audience by the end of the speech.36 Toward the conclusion, he asks a series of rhetorical questions about why writers of color like Mulk Raj Anand and Jacques Roumain have difficulty obtaining travel documents from their governments. When he was drafting the speech, he responded to the questions on the typescript by hand: “Why? We know why!”37 He deploys this kind of rhetorical move again and again in his writing from Spain. He appeals to the shared knowledge of the audience, and draws lines of connections between the local and the global. His writing urges people know and act, so that his audience joins in and declares “we know why!” or affirms with Johnny, “I want to be free!” The speech prompts his audience to collectively take up antiracist, antifascist protest.

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36 He remarks in the speech that the rights of African Americans in the United States are limited, “especially if we happen to be sharecroppers.” In a typed draft of the speech, he originally wrote “especially if they,” but crossed out “they” and wrote “we.” He strategically elides class particularities and difference; this effort to build collectives is generalized during the speech. Hughes, “Too Much of Race.”

37 Ibid.
When he highlights women activists, as he does in “A Note from Spain,” he prompts his audience to recognize the contributions of women and women of color in particular, and take gender into account in their analysis.

The Cuban poet and newspaper editor Nicolas Guillén and Haitian novelist and poet Jacques Roumain were also at the Writers' Congress, and Nancy Cunard wrote about their speeches in the article “Three Negro Poets,” in the Left Review. Hughes, Guillén, and Roumain met at the conference; in one of Cunard’s scrapbooks, there is a photograph of Roumain and the Spanish writer Ramon Sender, and Hughes, Guillén, Roumain, and Sender each signed around the photo.38 Cunard’s article excerpted each of their speeches and highlighted their roles as intermediaries. She wrote that each of them represented “a most vital link between his people, who are of colour, and our own white world. These poets are building a road between, a road called Understanding.”39 Cunard’s metaphor of a road resonates as an example of a symbol of translation and outreach that commentators on Hughes often invoked to describe his politics and poetics. She sent a copy of the article to Hughes, and her inscription revised her position within the metaphor, from “our own white world” to “our one road”: “Dear Langston, at last met, more than ever, therefore, embraced as a co-traveller on our one road— Nancy/ France/ August/ 1937.”40

Hughes traveled to Spain with Nicolas Guillén, and stayed for about five months, reporting for the Baltimore Afro-American, giving lectures and radio addresses, and writing and translating poetry.41 Hughes’s travels in Spain were marked by interactions with women like

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38 Cunard, Cosas de España.
40 Cunard, ms inscription on TS “Three Negro Poets,” Langston Hughes Papers, Schomburg Center.
41 Among the translations Hughes did were Guillén’s “Soldiers in Ethiopia” and Lorca’s “Gypsy Ballads.” When he published Gypsy Ballads years later, Hughes recalled in his introduction that the poems were “first translated at the ‘Alianza de Escritores’ in Madrid during the Civil War with the aid of the poets,
Cunard, the African-American nurse Salaria Kee, Louise Thompson, African American social worker Thyra Edwards, and other women. Spanish and foreign women in Spain took on prominent and largely unprecedented roles as writers, documentarians, soldiers, and speakers. Hughes was in Madrid for the photographer Gerda Taro’s funeral. He stayed at the Alianza de los Intelectuales Antifascistas, a residency for intellectuals and writers in Madrid run by the Spanish writers Rafael Alberti and María Teresa León. Hughes’s notebooks record the names of other women he met in Spain. Women were present in Hughes’s travels and the life of his writing. Noticing the presence of women in this history should shift how we evaluate Hughes’s proletarian writing from the late 1930s.

Hughes met and interviewed Salaria Kee for a *Baltimore Afro-American* article. Kee had traveled from Harlem, where she worked as a nurse, to volunteer in Spain. She was a surgery nurse at Villa Paz. The only African American woman to serve, Kee was famous among African American volunteer soldiers and in the black press. She recalled the outpouring she received when she arrived, a memory that invokes a sense of the role of epistolaries in the Spanish Civil War:

> As soon as I had reached Spain many of these American boys began to ask: "Have you met Oliver Law?" "Do you know Doug Roach?" "Aren't you Salaria Kea?" "Garland sent you this note." "Oh Salaria, Milton Herndon said that he would like to meet you." For two months messages and letters came to me from the Negro men I had never seen. [42] Hughes’s notebook provides details that didn’t make it into the published article. His notebook from his visit to Villa Paz indicates her local renown: “‘Salaria, Salud!’ All children for miles

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Rafael Alberti, Manuel Altolaguirre, and other friends of Lorca's.” Hughes, Introduction, García Lorca and Hughes, *Gypsy Ballads.*

around know her name.” In his notebook, he recorded Kee’s account of her friends’ reactions to her announcement that she was going to Spain that gives a sense of her determination to go to Spain not captured elsewhere:

“What? You’re going to Spain? And alone?”

“Sure,” Salaria answered. “I wasn’t born a twin. I have to go alone.”

“No matter how far off your goals may seem, go on, and go to it—That’s what I say to myself.”

His notes record her skill and compassion as a nurse, and describes the pace of the hospital, “Like a permanent Saturday night in Harlem.” These unpublished notes join the other records of women’s voices that remain to be recovered in the archives of the Spanish Civil War.

Hughes also transcribed from what he calls the Hospital Wall Paper (what I take to mean a wall newspaper, common during the war, where news would be posted in a public place), a message of antiracist solidarity on the occasion of her wedding. The declaration read:

Nosotros, Camarada Salaria, saludamos en ti a todos los hermanos neuestros de color y les decimos que nuestra victoria sera tambien la suya. Y a ti te deseamos toda suerte de felicidades lo mismo que a tu compañero: pues con vuestro union habeis puesto un jalon mas de victoria en nuestra lucha contra el racismo!

Viva la union proletaria! (Hughes, Notebook)

(We, Comrade Salaria, salute in you all of our brothers of color and say to them that our victory will also be theirs. And we wish you all sorts of happiness the same to your companion: for with your union you have set another milestone of victory in our struggle against racism.

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43 Hughes, “Notebook.”
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
Long live the proletarian union!)

The message links the struggles of people of color and the people of Republican Spain, and celebrates Kee’s marriage to John Joe Reilly, an Irish volunteer at Villa Paz. Their marriage was widely celebrated as a symbol of interracial solidarity in Spain. Hughes’s article for the Baltimore Afro-American, “N.Y. Nurse Weds Irish Fighter in Spain’s War” excerpted a description of the wedding from a letter by one of Kee’s colleagues, which reported, “Hemingway and Martha Gellhorn were here October 2, but could not stay for the wedding. They took the story, however.”

Hughes tells his readers that the letter was “passed on to Thyra Edwards and myself.”

Edwards traveled to Spain to undertake a study of women and children during the war with fellow social worker Constance Kyle. Edwards was a Texas-born activist who occasionally wrote for the Associated Negro Press. She’d traveled to Scandinavia, Germany, and Austria, studying labor schools earlier in the decade. In Hughes’s Afro-American profile of Kee, Hughes reports that Edwards, “a delegate from the Social Workers’ Committee for the Aid of Spanish Democracy . . . has just returned to Valencia from Madrid,” and is “especially interested in the problems of the women and children in war-torn Spain and is bringing back to America a report of her investigations here.”

Edwards reported on the war for the A.N.P., and translated a poem by Nicolas Guillén during her stay in Spain. She was also the subject of at least a few articles in the black press. The groundbreaking African American woman journalist Marvel Cooke endorsed Edwards’ organizing abilities the previous year in an article for the New Amsterdam News, coyly titled “She Was in Paris and Forgot Chanel.” Cooke declared that Edwards,

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46 Ibid. Translation mine, with generous help from Jennifer Prince.
47 Hughes, “N.Y. Nurse Weds Irish Fighter in Spain's War.”
48 Ibid.
“vivacious and vital, will have no trouble in capturing the interest of the American woman or in mobilizing them, either.”

“WHAT MUST I DO TO GET A LETTER?”

In one of Hughes’s spiral notebooks from Spain, he recorded fragments from a conversation with an unnamed Spanish Republican soldier. The note records a discussion of the ethics of letter-writing in wartime:

What must I do to get a letter?

Write.

No! Put me on the list to get a letter.

End of letter from his wife:

Salud y dinamita

para acabar con

los facistas

This dialogic fragment in Hughes’s notebook describes an economy of committed correspondence: in order to receive a letter, one must write. Then, it records a refusal: the speaker opts for some bureaucratic or automatic option that he believes exists—there is a list to receive a letter. Finally, the note records an excerpt from a successfully received letter from his wife. The wife’s letter demonstrates the fierce political will and performative language circulated in wartime letters. She sends health and dynamite to the soldier, to end the fascists. The Spanish word “Salud” had great sentiment attached to it in Republican Spain. It meant more than health,

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51 Hughes, Notebook “Paris to Spain 1937.”
as Brent Edwards has noted in his reading of its presence in as the valediction in Johnny’s letter to “Dear Brother at Home” in “Letter from Spain”:

[Salud] was adopted as a habitual, even ritual, salutation during the war among the republican forces—as Hughes pointed out elsewhere, it was “the word with which the loyalists greet one another,” and in this sense carried nearly as much weight as another well-known catch phrase of the period, No pasarán (They shall not pass). The performative sending of “salud” in letters from the Spanish Civil War, in this account of the letter from the wife, as well as in Hughes’s epistolary poems, and Hughes’s own correspondence during and for decades after the war, suggests the power of writing and message sending during such collective efforts.

A range of critical frames could emerge from this page in the spiral notebook. It highlights the social contract of a correspondence: to get a letter, one must write. The receipt of a letter then compels action on the part of the recipient, at the least to write a letter in response. The note immediately questions this economy, though, raising issues of consent, buy-in, and the potential for refusal. The man can assert “No!” and refuse to write a letter. Reading does not guarantee the equal investment from both sides of the correspondence. The idea that there might be a list that one could get on to receive a letter suggests the routinized and highly scripted behaviors during war. Finally, the wife’s letter invokes a letter as a kind of talisman. With highly performative language, she takes on the role of a collaborator, a comrade supplying arms, sending health and dynamite. The unideal letter recipient that is summoned on this page of Hughes’s notebook raises some questions about how to read “A Note from Spain.”

Sis’s undetermined response in “A Note from Spain” allows for the possibility that she might, like the soldier recorded in the notebook, reply “No!” “A Note from Spain” only provides

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Johnny’s side of the correspondence, and leaves us, and Sis, in the realm of becoming and possibility—including the possibility of refusal. Johnny appeals to Sis as a woman activist, a fellow worker, and an agent towards change. Sis is prompted to be a speaker, but she doesn’t actually speak within the poem. Sis’s silence complicates a straightforward feminist reading. But, on the other hand, the openness of the correspondence in “A Note from Spain,” and the poem’s anticipation around Sis’s speech, may be part of its didactic strength. It allows the reader of the poem to occupy the same space as Sis, on the verge of speaking on behalf of Spain. As readers, perhaps we place ourselves in Sis’s position as we read, or perhaps we read as interceptors of the letter, as voyeurs, but in either case the effect of the letter is left open, undetermined. The poem doesn’t provide the scene surrounding the letter’s arrival, what precedes or follows it. Isolated from its context, the poem leaves it to the reader to place Johnny’s appeal to Sis. As a purportedly private letter with a political mission, its public readership is prompted to take action in response.

By positioning a woman as an activist in “A Note from Spain,” Hughes defies the conventional modes of 1930s proletarian writing that typically heroized the masculine working body and limited women to roles as mothers of the revolution. Proletarian literature of the period tended to focus on male worker-heros, relegating women to romantic or reproductive roles. Paula Rabinowitz notes that women authors of revolutionary novels “rephrased the rhetoric that encoded the proletarian as masculine by putting feminine sexuality and maternity into working class narratives.” They “helped produce a(nother) class-conscious private realm, revising the genre of the revolutionary novel.” In Hughes’s work from the Spanish Civil War, we can mark a similar practice: he created a “class-conscious private realm,” by revising the traditionally

54 Rabinowitz, Labor & Desire, 182.
55 Ibid.
domestic epistolary form into an anti-fascist, internationalist form. He crossed the generic boundaries of revolutionary poetry to include race and gender.

The epistolary poems cross borders: Spain and Alabama, black and white, warfront and domestic realms. Hughes repeatedly worked to relate the war in Spain to African-American audiences, and vice-versa, in the poems, speeches, and articles he wrote. Many of Hughes’s poems invoke communicative technologies that have the capacity to cross geographic and ideological boundaries. His poetic memos, letters, notes, postcards, radio broadcasts, and film scenarios, make explicit the public, social role he intended for his poetry. The epistolary form suggests an additional crossing of public and private space that resonates with, and amplifies, his feminist commitments.

When Johnny instructs Sis to “Tell Buddy to join the C.I.O./ He couldn’t join the A.F. of L.,” Hughes alludes to a particular moment in American labor history, after the C.I.O. split from the American Federation of Labor’s craft unionism to organize by industry in the mid-1930s, and created opportunities for black organizing. Technically, Johnny’s statement is not entirely accurate; Buddy could have joined an A.F.L. union, because the A.F.L. did organize some biracial unions, with separate locals according to race. But Hughes's statement was true in spirit, since the C.I.O. offered integrated unions and more opportunities black workers to participate. Though the C.I.O. also had shortcomings for black workers on local and national

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levels, their unions had significant membership drives among workers in the South, bolstered by recent federal labor legislation. The poem particularly suggests the role of black women in this organizing. Jacqueline Jones notes in her study of black women workers, that in the mid-1930s, “at least some black communities threw their support behind union activities for the first time, impressed with the relative openness of C.I.O. policies and with the uncompromisingly egalitarian rhetoric of the Communist Party.”  

She goes on to note that the CP “conducted several dramatic, successful organizing drives that made full use of black women's leadership abilities.” Thyra Edwards had worked as a C.I.O. organizer and had encountered some controversy when she addressed an A.F.L. union in Texas, because the C.I.O. was seen as much more radical.

Black and Communist participation in C.I.O. unions (particularly after Comintern identified the Black Belt as the site for black self-determination in 1928) would have raised the profile of the C.I.O. both in Alabama and Spain. During his time in Paris and Spain in 1937, Hughes mentioned the significance of the C.I.O. to European audiences several times, linking the struggles in Spain to labor issues at home. In the speech he gave in Paris at the Second International Writers Congress in July 1937, “Too Much of Race,” Hughes celebrated that “Negro and white workers in the great industrial cities of the North under John L. Lewis and the C.I.O. have begun to create a great labor force that refuses to recognize the color line.” A typed list of Hughes's publications and speeches in Spain includes the entry “Negroes and Labor/ A.F. Of L. ---------C.I.O.” In an article for the Baltimore Afro-American, he highlighted the C.I.O.'s international reputation for his American readers, reporting that people ask him “whether the

58 Jones, Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow, 212.
59 Ibid., 212-213.
61 Kelley, Hammer and Hoe.
cooled people are a part of the CIO that is now so often mentioned in the European papers.”

The exhortation in the following stanza, when Johnny tells Sis to tell all the people “Bow down and get your backsides kicked/ Or stand up and be free,” seems to be an American vernacular version of the slogan popularized by the Spanish Republican leader and orator Dolores Ibarruri, popularly known as La Pasionaria: “it is better to stand and fight than die on your knees.” Hughes’s rewriting of the phrase, to “stand up and be free,” makes explicit that the stakes of this shared struggle are emancipatory. “A Note from Spain” positions Sis as a spokesperson in line with La Pasionaria. The outspokenness of La Pasionaria, like the role that Sis is positioned to take (telling Buddy to join the CIO, and telling all the people what Spain taught Johnny), provides a model of women’s roles in the Spanish Civil War and antiracist struggles.

La Pasionaria was a celebrated figure, whose admirers included black women activists in the U.S. The left-wing magazine *Woman Today*, on whose editorial board Louise Thompson and Thyra Edwards each served in the 1930s, featured Ibarruri in a September 1936 article, “Women in Spain.” The editorial challenged the stereotypical view that Spanish women were isolated and backward, noting:

Daily events tell of another kind of Spanish woman, Milicianas, who, armed and aggressive, are taking their places in the front line with men. Their leader is Dolores Ibarruri. She not only plays a major role in the War Ministry in Madrid, but is looked on as a champion of the masses.  

Ibarurri also served as a champion for women in the United States. Richard Wright reported on a Communist Party branch of Spanish women in Harlem, named after La Pasionaria, for the *Daily

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62 Hughes, “Madrid Getting Used to Bombs, It’s Food Shortage that Hurts.”
63 “Woman Today.,” 4.
Worker: “the ideal in their hearts is La Pasionaria, the heroine of the Loyalist Spanish Masses.”

La Pasionaria, and the Spanish Civil War more broadly, was also an inspiration to a young generation of black women activists that included Claudia Jones and Esther Cooper Jackson, as Erik McDuffie’s Sojourning for Truth notes. Esther Cooper recalled of Ibarruri, “She was a leader of women. She was the revolution.” Many radical African Americans saw the war in Spain as an extension of Mussolini’s attack on Ethiopia in 1935. The war in Spain was a radicalizing, internationalizing moment that Hughes, Cunard, Thompson, Kee, and Edwards fostered in their public commentary. In journalism for the black press, radio addresses, translations, and poetry, they linked the exploits of fascism, colonialism, capitalism, and racism.

The women activists Hughes engaged with politically and personally often took on public, outspoken roles. Hughes’s friend and fellow poet Gwendolyn Bennett wrote a Spanish Civil War poem, “Threnody for Spain” (1939). Louise Thompson visited Spain in August 1937, before traveling to Paris as a delegate in the Second World Congress Against Racism and Anti-Semitism in September. In 1935, Hughes wrote a letter to Matt Crawford telling him about Thompson’s growth as a public speaker. Hughes drew a tiny stick figure speaking on a ladder and reported, “Lou makes speeches from a step ladder and is great.” Thompson continued to be publicly outspoken during the Spanish Civil War, in speeches at meetings, in newspaper interviews, and on the radio. While she was in Madrid, she spoke on shortwave radio with Hughes and two African American International Brigade volunteers, the Communist leader Harry Haywood and Walter Garland:

Four of us, Negroes, broadcast one night to America—Langston Hughes, Harry

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64 Quoted in McDuffie, Sojourning for Freedom, 101.
65 Kelley, Introduction to Collum, Berch, and Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives, African Americans in the Spanish Civil War.
66 Quoted in Locke and Stewart, The Critical Temper of Alain Locke, 289.
Haywood, Walter Garland and I. We leave the hotel at twelve midnight. Through the dark streets, past block after block of houses . . . we have the password for the night. . . . We wanted so much to be heard in America, we wanted to convey to those at home what Spain means, why we are there, why they should help.  

Like Thompson’s remarks, Hughes’s writing aims to reach across boundaries of nation and race to urge the relevance of the Spanish Civil War.

The epistolary poems Hughes wrote from Spain are not “frightful[ly] modernistic” in their form, but they crucially revise the traditionally private, bourgeois epistolary form (and the typical soldier's letter home). Johnny’s letter to Sis is a missive that is written at an individual level, but, as a poem written for publication, it also hails a collective. The poem is framed with the formal, written elements of a letter (the sender’s address, date, salutation, signature), but the body of the letter evokes something spoken, or even sung. “A Note from Spain” is basically in ballad form: its meter alternates mainly between tri- and tetrameter, with rhyming antepenultimate and final lines in each four-line stanza. The strong meter, rhyme, and mildly vernacular language of the “Johnny” poems connect them to the realm of embodied, collective performance. The tension between the ballad form and the epistolary form in the series of Johnny poems, produces an appropriate dialectic. The epistolary poems, as letter-ballad hybrids, can be imagined as a model for addressing the particular within an internationalist imaginary. The letter-

68 Thompson Patterson, “Negroes in Spain.”

An article in the black press covering her trip reported that “Miss Louise Thompson, left wing leader, [. . .] has recently returned from Spain where she, Langston Hughes, and two army officers participated in an international broadcast to America on August 26.” “Americans Earn High Posts With Loyalists,” Baltimore Afro-American, 24.

In a previous publication, I mistakenly suggested that Thompson and Hughes’s radio broadcast may have been with El Campesino and Bailio Cuero (a photograph of the four of them was published in the Baltimore Afro-American). It seems clear from this article, however, that Harry Haywood and Walter Garland were the other two in the radio broadcast.
form suggests the sending of the cultural and political specificity of the vernacular ballad across a distance. The rhyme and meter of the poems suggest that these letters could be received as scores or scripts to be sung or recited collectively, in contrast to the private letter, which, while it may be read aloud, is normally, in the twentieth century, conceived of as an individual author addressing a single predetermined, announced reader.

The poems rhyme and follow conventional meter. But they take part in a vernacular modernism, and moreover, they take the epistolary form, a form often relegated to the realm of “women’s writing,” and make it public and political. Critics sometimes posit a typology of Hughes’s poetry that marks out the modernist work (good) from the political work (bad, or, in Rampersad’s somewhat infamous description, “doggerel”).\(^69\) I’d like to propose that these epistolary poems prompt us to discard this typology. Such play with form should be understood as modernist. As Seth Moglen argues, “These formal experiments were the urgent efforts of men and women to find strategies to represent and respond to the social forces that were—often catastrophically—transforming their lives.”\(^70\) Some of Hughes’s poems from Spain are modernistic in a conventionally recognizable way. For instance, “Air Raid: Barcelona” uses the space of the page to plot out an aerial bombing spatially.\(^71\) The reader’s eye moves across the page as if following a plane across the sky. “Madrid,” creates a montage with a “News Item,” that reports the clocks have stopped, and the poem’s account of the plight and resistance of Madrid.\(^72\) “A Note from Spain,” though explicitly political and in a semi conventional form, must be understood as another such formal experiment.

Hughes experiments with poetic form to newly conceptualize internationalism and human

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\(^{69}\) Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes*, 351.


\(^{72}\) Ibid., 614–617.
relationship. Though “A Note from Spain” presents itself as a letter between individuals within its fictional frame, it has a public life as a text to be published that makes an appeal to a collective. Each reading rehearses Johnny’s letter, and prompts the reader to take on the role of the letter’s recipient. Hughes was extremely interested in performance, and the potential of writing to prompt action on the part of the audience, as is apparent in poems like “Chant for May Day,” published in A New Song, and the play Don’t You Want to be Free?, written upon his return from Spain. Hughes’s poetics relies on what Rancière describes as “the power each of [the members of the audience] has to translate what she perceives in her own way, to link it to the unique intellectual adventure that makes her similar to all the rest in as much as this adventure is not like any other.” The poem’s didactic content appeals the reader of this epistolary as an actor prompted to reiterate its message rather than as a voyeur arbitrarily granted access to a private letter and the stories it contains. “A Note from Spain” invites its readers to place themselves in Sis’s position, and make the connections between, “make a story out of,” the private realm, women workers, African American volunteers in Spain, the Republican efforts, union organizing, the figure of La Pasionaria, and so on. In translating each of these elements on to one another, and in translating these elements into the readers’ experience on an individual level, Hughes sends a letter that prompts collective action among his readers.

In Madrid, in 1937, Hughes typed a poem on a piece of scrap paper that I propose should be adopted as one of his poetics statements. This unpublished and uncollected poem suggests that Hughes’s flexibility in moving between conventional tropes and transgressive politics, high modernism and vernacular ballads is rooted in a commitment to “making a story” without regard for “Poetry’s high estate.” The poem uses montage to connect poetry and storytelling with a

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73 Rancière and Elliott, The emancipated spectator, 16–17.
74 Hughes, “Madrid Celebrates.”
responsibility to “the people” (or “the race”), as well as to revolutionary possibility:

    I have no great regard
    For Poetry’s high estate.
    I'd ride him down the muddy road
    And tie him at the gate,
    And feed him hay and carrots
    After a lengthy wait.

    One makes a story out of what one is, what one isn't,
    and what one would like to be.

    Soy de la raza jale.

MADRID CELEBRATES RUSSIA’S TWENTY YEARS

I read this poem as an invitation from Hughes to take action, prompting readers to discard any sense that reading should be a passive activity, and to become a participant, to “make a story” out of disparate parts. The reader of this poem must, at least temporarily, consider a relationship between poetry, working class and antiracist politics, and anticapitalist revolution. The poem provides a linear image of the poet leading poetry down the muddy road. However, the poem requires us to trace multiple, intersecting routes across geographic and ideological distances as we read. Hughes claims a pragmatic and instrumental poetics here. The poem posits poetry as a common, working animal—a mule, perhaps. Poetry as a mule, an animal that is worked very

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75 Hughes, “Madrid Celebrates.”
hard offers a challenge to art-for-arts sake notions of poetry, and, because it cannot sexually reproduce, rebuffs reproductive metaphors in revolutionary literature, that are prone to casting women solely in the role of mother. Instead, poetry is a thing to provoke action, and to create affiliations beyond blood relation. Hughes’s poems in this era often prompt and sometimes explicitly urge the reader to shift from their role as reader or spectator to actor, the transition that Rancière defines as emancipation.

As if it were a cut-out headline from a newspaper pasted at the bottom of the poem, the final line stands in juxtaposition to the rest of the poem. In fact, each section of the poem is distinct in form, language, style. The reader interprets these juxtapositions with a process similar to that demanded by a collage. Each piece, while separate, exerts meaning onto the surrounding pieces. The penultimate line, in Spanish, and doesn’t directly connect to what precedes it, or what follows. The speaker in that line identifies itself with the working class, and, juxtaposed with the final line, suggests a connection between Republican Spain and the Russian Revolution. The poem links the claim to identity (“I am of the working people,” with the echo of “race” in “la raza”), with the announcement that Madrid, such a crucially contested location during the Spanish Civil War, celebrates the anniversary of the Russian Revolution. Hughes engages the reader to do work to make sense of their relationships, by placing distinct ideas in proximity to one another. The reader considers the relationships between the elements in this poem, just as readers of his epistolary poems must consider the relationship between Spain and Alabama.

Hughes bridges remote geographies in his poetry, occupying and taking shape in interstitial spaces, like the road, the sea. The networks of correspondence and friendship that marked Hughes’s experience in Spain and facilitated the publication of his work call for a model like the feminist webs of interconnection that feminist scholars like Bonnie Kime Scott
developed to describe literary relationships.\textsuperscript{76} Hughes’s own writing and correspondence provides models for conceptualizing such a relation. He wrote poems that were engaged in lateral, experimental border crossing, reaching out, through letters, dialogues, and montage, to connect disparate positions. His epistolary poems occupy a similarly interstitial space between writer and recipient—not yet delivered, perpetually in the process of being sent, reaching across. While Hughes was in Spain, Louise Thompson wrote to him that, on account of his articles in \textit{The Baltimore Afro-American}, “Afro-America is learning about Spain, about those Negro fighters who stretch the bonds of solidarity across the sea of the ole Atlantic and of race.”\textsuperscript{77} A few years later in 1941, in the midst of a controversy over his 1931 poem “Christ in Alabama,” Thyra Edwards reassured him, “It is your defiant defense of social decency that has translated your songs into the language of the world and carried them to the remotest hideaway of those to whom the struggle for liberty is life’s dominant motif.” Edwards’ use of the metaphor “translation” seems apt—and of course Hughes is also literally translating and being translated in these years.\textsuperscript{78} Hughes’s epistolary poems from Spain attempt the things described in the metaphors Thompson, Cunard, and Edwards invoke—they travel down the muddy road, the road of Understanding, they cross the sea of the Atlantic and of race, they reach the remotest hideaways carrying a message of social justice. On the one hand, the poetic form is straightforward: the poems are epistolary; they follow regular patterns of rhyme and meter. Yet, Hughes also uses the form to create a space of internationalism and to highlight multiple connections.

“A Note from Spain” suggests alternative orders of kinship not only in the broad sense of

\textsuperscript{76} Scott, \textit{Refiguring Modernism}, xi.
\textsuperscript{77} Thompson, Correspondence with Langston Hughes.
\textsuperscript{78} Thyra Edwards’ comment resonates with discussions of internationalist “translation,” literal and metaphorical, in Vera Kutzinski and Brent Edwards’ work.
sisterhood and relation inscribed in the term “Sis,” but in the multiple identifications it implicitly asks of its wider readership. Hughes's letter-poems embody both the potential for and a deferment of interpersonal consummation, like canonical epistolary literature, such as *Clarissa*, that deals with the progression of a relationship toward marriage.\(^79\) Hughes’s epistolary poems do not proceed toward a marriage, but they are interested in bringing people together in a type of social union, and, as such, are also preoccupied with moments of contact. At the same time that Johnny’s letter acts as an object that can potentially bridge disparate subject positions and geographies, it also marks the perpetual distance amongst these positions, and the limits and challenges of internationalism. Hughes previously used the epistolary form in the story “Passing,” in the collection *The Ways of White Folks* (1934). In that story, a man writes to his mother expressing his regret that his passing forced him to ignore her when they encountered each other on the street. When he expresses his gratitude that at least letters can cross the color line, it is both a truism and a judgment on the character’s acceptance of the insufficient status quo. The epistolary form, both in Hughes’s poems and story, allows him to critically mark the formidable distances across racial, gendered, and national divides, while he explores the potential for connection across them.

Hughes’s journalism also attempted to build bridges between the experience of war in Spain and his readers at the *Baltimore Afro-American*. In one of his articles, Hughes described a scene of total war. He describes a scene in a Madrid neighborhood: “But the strange thing to me about these trenches was that they were not long straight lines such as we see in the war movies. Instead they curved and zig-zagged through gardens, under fences, and beneath houses.”\(^80\) The trenches defied genre; instead of being remote, muddy dugouts, they disrupted a domestic scene:

\(^80\) Hughes, “Madrid’s Getting Used to Bombs.”
“Sometimes they passed right through the wall and living room of a cottage, or maybe through the whole house, past the stove in the kitchen and then on out of doors to become an open trench again.” In this disregard for boundaries between public and private and the disruption of residential structure and stability, Hughes finds modernism: “Like frightful modernistic drawings, the mangled houses lifted their broken walls and torn roofs to the cool blue sky . . .” This view of war is a feminist one. Like Virginia Woolf’s refrain of the “ruined house and dead bodies” in Three Guineas when she describes the photographs the Spanish Government sends, Hughes fixes his gaze upon the domestic realm, and records how it is rent apart by war. The strange zig-zags and curves of the trench running through the homes in Hughes’s description take on new, unfamiliar forms. The scene of war doesn’t mimic scenes from movies. Rather, it makes visible the impact of war beyond the battlefield, and emphasizes that domestic, private space and war are deeply interconnected. Like the trenches of Madrid that traverse public and private realms, and defy the typical form of trenches, Hughes forged poetic forms to match the experience of internationalist, antifascist war.

“DON’T YOU WANT TO BE FREE?”

Hughes returned to New York from the Spanish Civil War at the beginning of 1938, and continued to experiment with form to cross divides of history, geography, gender, race, and class—notably, in theatrical works on stage. With Louise Thompson, he founded the Harlem Suitcase Theatre, and staged his poetry-play Don’t You Want to Be Free? The play was very successful. It was performed 138 times in Harlem, and was also staged by many other theatre groups, including Hughes’s later theatre projects in Los Angeles and Chicago. At the

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81 Woolf, Marcus, and Hussey, Three Guineas, 14.
82 Hill and Hatch, A History of African American Theatre, 312.
beginning of 1939, his friend, the translator and librarian Dorothy Peterson wrote to Hughes, “Apparently DYWTBF is the play of the year—every town and city will be doing it this season.” While the play took part in an important moment in the history of American and African American theatre, during the WPA Federal Theatre projects, and the emergence of various proletarian theatre groups, Hughes’s theatre activities should also be understood transnationally in terms of Hughes’s concurrent engagement with the Spanish Civil War. Like the plays being staged in Spain, Hughes’s plays have an emancipatory commitment, and Soviet and folk influences. Looking at Don’t You Want to be Free in this context brings attention to Hughes’s longtime engagement with the Hispanic world. It also brings African American theatre, typically discussed as an isolated unit, into an international conversation.

Hughes’s theatrical strategies were influenced by the Soviet, German, and Spanish artistic movements that he encountered in his travels, and which were reaching American stages throughout the 1930s. During the war in Spain, radical theatre was performed in public space, for troops at the front, and in theaters that had been collectivized during the war. Theatrical experiments and aesthetic debates that had been established earlier in the 1930s were adapted to the conditions of war. In his study of theatre in Republican Spain, Jim McCarthy’s notes:

the wartime teatro de urgencia also sought a preeminent role for the spectator. Frequently the subject of the drama, he or she was always the plays' direct propaganda target since, either through instruction or entertainment, the purpose of teatro de urgencia was to present its audiences with appropriate models of Republican behaviour.84

The Spanish writer Rafael Alberti called for the creation of works that could be easily performed by amateurs and in improvised settings. After a performance in Madrid in December 1937, he

83 Peterson, “Correspondence with Hughes.”
84 McCarthy, Political Theatre during the Spanish Civil War, 31.
commented, “There's a need for these rapid, intense little works . . . which adapt themselves technically to the specific composition of the theatre groups. A piece of this type can't pose staging difficulties or demand a large number of actors. Its length shouldn't exceed half an hour.”

Hughes met Alberti in Spain, and he stayed at the Alliance of Antifascist Intellectuals in Madrid, which Alberti ran with his wife María Teresa Léon (who herself was director in the theatre group Guerrillas del Teatro). Hughes recalled in the translator’s note to his translation of Lorca’s Gypsy Ballads that he first translated the poems “in Madrid during the Civil War with the aid of the poets, Rafael Alberti, Manuel Altolaguirre, and other friends of Lorca's.” Alberti had translated poems by Hughes before the war, published in El Mono Azul. When he returned from Spain, Hughes wrote plays fulfilled Alberti’s recommendation for teatro de urgencia. The idea behind the suitcase theatre was to put on shows that didn’t require many resources. Its name suggests a potential mobility akin to the traveling troupes in Spain. Louise Thompson recalled that when Hughes arrived in the U.S. from Spain, “He had already picked the name . . . it was not just a name, it was a concept . . . he wanted a people’s theater.”

The Harlem Suitcase Theatre and Hughes’s plays from this time ought to be considered in light of their relationship to Spanish theatre and antifascist, antiracist, internationalist politics. Whether satire or documentary montage, his plays aimed to empower and engage the audience to take action at a time of fascist and racist aggression. Hughes gave the speech “Writers, Words and the World” at the Meeting of the International Writers Association for the Defense of Culture while he was in Paris in 1938. In the speech, he argued, “The shortest poem or story—let us say about a child playing quietly alone in a courtyard—and such a poem or story will be a

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85 Quoted in Ibid., xiv.
86 Linhard, Fearless Women in the Mexican Revolution and the Spanish Civil War, 190.
87 García Lorca and Hughes, Gypsy Ballads, translator’s note.
88 Thompson Patterson, “Draft of Chapter 8 of Memoir.”
better one if the author understands the relationship of his child to the Tokio war-machine moving against China.”89 We can bring this criteria to our reading of Don’t You Want to Be Free, and insist on considering the play in light of its author’s understanding of the relationship of his topic to the antifascist war in Spain.

Don’t You Want to be Free stages a montage of African American history, beginning in Africa, and spanning the slave market in the U.S. South, migration north, urban consumer strikes, and riots in Harlem.90 The play combines poetry, dialogue, and song, moving from blues to protest genres. The presence of a newsboy and a news editor in one segment recalls the newspaper plays, pioneered in Europe, brought to the US and used in working class and radical theatres in the 1930s and popularized by the Federal Theatre Project. Hughes also cites spirituals, blues, and protest songs, pivoting between popular genres and social justice documentary. The play explicitly deals with the theme of emancipation signaled in the title, and the staging and form of the play prompts audience members to take action to make social change.

Don’t You Want to Be Free opens with a monologue that addresses the audience directly. The play’s first speaker announces at the outset, “This show is for you. And you can act in it, too, if you want to. This is your show, as well as ours.”91 The play directly calls for the audience to cross the threshold from spectator to actor. Hughes enacts Jacques Ranciere’s idea of the “emancipated spectator.” Ranciere defines emancipation as the crossing from being a spectator to taking action: “That is what the word ‘emancipation’ means: the blurring of boundary between those who act and those who look; between individuals and members of the collective body.”92 Hughes uses theater as a medium for emancipation. In the finale, the script calls for the audience

89 Hughes, Essays on Art, Race, Politics, and World Affairs, 199.
90 Hughes, Don’t You Want to Be Free?.
91 Ibid., 360.
92 Rancière and Elliott, The emancipated spectator, 19.
to rise up and join in song: the stage directions read, “As they sing the audience joins with them, and various members of the audience, workers, doctors, nurses, professional men, teachers, white and black, come forward to link hands with the characters in the play until the players and the audience are one” and they sing, “Oh, who wants to come and join hands with me?/ Who wants to make one great unity?” Hughes prompts the audience to join the actors in taking action to protest injustice, to be activated as they witness the history he puts on stage. To the provocation in the title of Don’t You Want to be Free?, he provides space for his characters and audience to collectively respond in the affirmative.

The engagement with the audience that Hughes incorporated in his play was not an anomaly in the 1930s. Soviet and German film techniques influenced Spanish avant garde writers, as they influenced Hughes and others in the United States, and elsewhere. The German director Erwin Piscator and several Soviet filmmakers influenced Ramon Sender, a Spanish author with whom Hughes was acquainted during the war. Sender focused on the role of the spectator as the aspect that most needed to change in traditional theater to create a teatro de masas. Rather than adopt the traditional, passive role of audience, Sender said that theater should be an active collaboration between actors, audience. Like Sender, Hughes had traveled to the Soviet Union earlier in the 1930s and cited the theatre productions he encountered there as an influence on his own work. Meyerhold’s episodic, multi-genre plays and Oklopkov’s theatre Krasni Presnia made an impression during his travels in the Soviet Union. Hughes recalled a production of Gorky’s Mother in Oklopkov’s theater that “involv[ed] audience participation in the most thorough manner I have ever seen it used...the audience taking on each other as part of

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93 Hughes, "Don’t You Want to Be Free?.
94 McCarthy, Political Theatre during the Spanish Civil War.
95 Ibid.
the action.” He recognized the influence of Soviet theatre on his own work: “I acquired a number of interesting ways of staging plays, some of which I later utilized in directing my own Negro history play, *Don’t You Want To Be Free*.”

The Harlem Suitcase Theatre was not operating in a vacuum in the U.S. or among African-American theatres. There was a Suitcase Theatre in New York downtown, and there were several other proletarian and Popular Front theatre projects, including the Federal Theatre Project units, New Theatre League, and League of Workers’ Theatres. Women played key roles in the life of the Harlem Suitcase Theatre, and other black theatre productions. Fanny McConnell (later Fanny McConnell Ellison, when she married Ralph Ellison) founded the Chicago Negro People’s Theatre a few months after the Harlem Suitcase Theatre began, and *Don’t You Want to Be Free* was also their debut performance. In 1935, Rose McClendon had founded the Negro People’s Theatre in New York, and ran it until her death in 1936. The Karamu Theatre in Cleveland, part of a community center founded in 1915 by the white couple Russell and Rowena Jelliffe, was a center for black artists in the Midwest. Hughes visited Karamu as a teenager, and returned to write plays for the Gilpin Players in the 1930s as resident playwright. Later in the decade, Hughes helped found the New Negro Theatre in Los Angeles in 1939, and the Skyloft Players in Chicago. In addition to these projects, the Federal Theatre Project of the Works’ Progress Administration established 17 Negro units in U.S. cities, ten of which survived to the end of the program in 1939. The Popular Front era was a rich moment for African American

97 Quoted in Ibid., 6.
100 Barton, “Speaking a Mutual Language,” 65; Plum, “Rose McClendon and the Black Units of the Federal Theatre Project.”
theatre. In 1940, the Negro Playwright’s Company of Harlem was founded, which claimed among its active members Hughes and Owen Dodson, among its associate members Paul Robeson, Richard Wright, Gwendolyn Bennett, and Alain Locke; and Theodore Ward served as President.\textsuperscript{102} There were also Southern Negro Youth Congress-organized theaters in Richmond and New Orleans, and the American Negro Theatre founded in Harlem.\textsuperscript{103}

The Harlem Suitcase Theatre conceived of itself as a community, participatory effort. A pamphlet the theatre distributed had a section titled “Who Comprise the Suitcase Theatre?” which offered the answer, “You are the people who will form the nucleus of the Harlem Suitcase Theatre” and promoted an identification between actor and audience: “The actors and actresses will be counterparts of yourselves: their speech the same as yours; their actions, moods and problems merely repetitions of those which are seen and heard daily a thousandfold.”\textsuperscript{104} Another section responded to “Why a Suitcase Theatre?” with the explanation, “Because the directors of the group believe that the clearest pictures are those whose background lies in the imagination of the audience . . . as a People’s Theatre, it seeks to tell the story of the masses in sharp, sure strokes which need no framing.”\textsuperscript{105} Admission to the theatre was 35 cents; the actors were largely amateur, though several including Earl Jones went on to acting careers; and audiences were around 75 percent African American.\textsuperscript{106}

Hughes wrote letters to Louise Thompson and Dorothy Peterson from Paris in the summer of 1938 that highlight the overlapping timelines of the Suitcase Theatre and the ongoing Spanish Civil War. In a letter to Thompson, he mentions that “Miss Grimke would like to be on

\begin{thebibliography}{3}
\bibitem{103} Barton, “Speaking a Mutual Language,” 56.
\bibitem{104} Harlem Suitcase Theatre Pamphlet.
\bibitem{105} Ibid.
\bibitem{106} Hatch and Shine, \textit{Black Theatre USA}, 262.
\end{thebibliography}
our play-reading Committee,” and signs the letter, “Yours till our Suitcase is a trunk.”

In another he reports, “I didn’t go to Spain, but have seen lots of the boys here,” referring to the volunteer soldiers who had traveled to fight for the Spanish Republic. In a letter to Dorothy Peterson from the same trip to Paris 1938, Langston Hughes reported that he’d met one of the actors from Lorca’s traveling theater troupe, *La Baracca*. Peterson, a Harlem Spanish teacher, archivist, and translator, who had acted as Lorca’s translator in parties in Harlem while Lorca was in New York, was a friend and collaborator of Hughes, whose relationship has been recently described in an article by Evelyn Scaramella. Peterson was working on a translation of the Lope de Vega’s *Fuenteovejuna*, a play Federico Garcia Lorca’s troupe had staged in 1933, and which depicted an uprising of villagers against an abusive commander. Hughes reports in this letter that the actor told him that Lorca’s troupe performed *Fuenteovejuna* “in ordinary present day clothes of village folk. They staged it on a truck, with only suggested sets, but excellent lighting.”

Hughes continues in the same letter to say that he’s started a new translation project: “I have translated Lorca’s *Bodas de Sangre*, a beautiful thing done here last season by a left theatre group with much success. I’m afraid it’s too hard for us, without sets, but maybe some other group in New York will like it.” Hughes’s translation of Lorca’s play, whose title is commonly translated as “Blood Wedding” in English, was never produced during his lifetime, but the British poet Nancy Cunard mentioned Hughes’s translation of a Lorca play in her article “Negroes Help Republican Spain,” for the London newspaper *The New Times & Ethiopia News.*

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107 Hughes, Correspondence with Louise Thompson Patterson, July 16, 1938.
108 Hughes, Correspondence with Louise Thompson Patterson, September 2, 1938.
109 Hughes, Correspondence with Dorothy Peterson, August 30, 1938.
110 Scaramella, “Literary Liaisons: Translating the Avant Garde from Spain to Harlem.”
111 Ibid., 66.
112 Ibid.
She reflected, “Maybe he will stage it at his own theatre in Harlem, ‘The Suitcase Theatre,’ which he founded after his return to America from Spain this spring.” The presence of Lorca in Hughes’s theatrical activities in 1938 suggests an ideological commitment and aesthetic genealogy that ties the Suitcase Theatre to Spain and the Spanish Civil War.

Hughes’s theatre projects, like “A Note from Spain” and “Sister Johnson Marches,” featured outspoken women in activist roles. Ophelia Settle Egypt wrote to Hughes about a performance of Don’t You Want to Be Free at Dillard in 1939, “The section that you lifted bodily from Marx drew the greatest applause. The statements by the women picketing and the young man speaking to the editor were next.” The well-received picketing women that Ophelia Settle Egypt made special note of in her letter points to an important element in Don’t You Want to be Free, that Hughes featured women as key figures in protest movements. The plot incorporates women-led urban protest movements around rent and food prices. In Harlem in the 1930s, real-life women leaders like Bonita Williams and Audley Moore successfully led protests against rent and food prices. In Don’t You Want to Be Free? several women agitators and activists feature prominently when segregation in restaurants and rent and wage exploitation come to a head. Like Sis and Sister Johnson, the women in the play are figured as spokespeople and as catalysts for a mass movement. One woman stands up to a landlord about a rent increase: “I ain’t gonna pay no more. We’re paying enough.” Another woman enters the stage holding a sign that reads: “DON’T BUY HERE! THIS STORE DOES NOT EMPLOY NEGRO CLERKS.”

113 Nancy Cunard, “Negroes Help Republican Spain.”
114 Lorca was a public intellectual targeted for his sexuality, poetry, and politics when Nationalists in Granada killed him in 1936, a month after the Civil War began. Cunard had a year previously paired a poem of Lorca’s with Hughes’s “Song of Spain” in a pamphlet series she produced with Pablo Neruda, Poets of the World Defend the Spanish People. The cover of the pamphlet declared, “Intellectuals! Fight in your own countries the assassins of Federico Garcia Lorca.” García Lorca and Hughes, Deux poèmes.
115 Egypt, correspondence with Hughes.
116 McDuffie, Sojourning for Freedom, 60.
117 Hughes, ”Don’t You Want to Be Free?.

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refuses to pay an insurance company: “A company that won’t hire none of my people, what wont half insure us.” She tells him, “Go on back downtown to your Jim Crow office. Tell ‘em Harlem is tired. (She shoos him out.) I’m gonna join a colored insurance company myself.” Another woman’s boss approaches her “Say, Toots, Listen…” and she replies with “Toots, who?” and goes on to tell him to “take that salary and stick it on back in your drawer, from now on, cause I am tired of working for nothing . . . You making all your money off of colored folks and taking every dollar of it out of Harlem to spend.” The boss accuses her in reply: “You must belong to the union . . . You’re an agitator!”

Don’t You Want to be Free? represents women in a range of ways: in traditional gender roles, in problem-ridden relationships, and as activists, organizing rent and shopping strikes. The first section plays on popular tropes in popular culture—characters perform blues songs, and other popular music. The popular familiarity of these forms presumably was an effort to make the material of the play more accessible and appealing to a wide audience. Activist women in other sections of the play inhabit the kind of role we can imagine Hughes intended to represent in his proposed series of poems on black women that would have included “Sister Johnson Marches” and “A Note from Spain.” In his plays, Hughes sometimes modified representations of women fulfilling traditional roles as mothers and lovers in order to incorporate political engagement. He also sometimes shed the traditional roles completely, and depicted women primarily as political actors.

Hughes featured activist women in other political plays including especially Harvest, his 1934 collaboration with Ella Winter that featured the outspoken Jenni who is secretary of the local, a leader in the cotton-pickers’ strike, and the protagonist of the play, based on the
California activist Caroline Decker. \textsuperscript{118} *The Organizer* (written in Paris during the same 1938 trip when he was translating Lorca’s *Bodas de Sangre* and writing to Peterson about *Fuenteovenjuna*) also features an outspoken, committed woman, though her role is decidedly secondary to the organizer of the title. \textsuperscript{119} Hughes’s plays and poetry from this time suggest that we might reassess Hughes’s 1930s work as feminist and recognize his expansive notion of emancipation. Hughes portrayed women in a variety of ways—playing on popular tropes from the blues, proletarian literature, and African-American literary traditions—and importantly, he cast women in the roles of workers and activists, not only in *Don’t You Want To Be Free?* but also notably in *Harvest* (1934) and to an extent *The Organizer* (1939). Hughes’s theater projects place women in anti-oppression movements at the center. They demonstrate that his understanding of emancipation is crucially intersectional. Further, the centrality of women like Louise Thompson and Dorothy Peterson to the history of the Harlem Suitcase Theatre underscores the importance of black left feminism within antiracist and antifascist movements in the twentieth-century.

A precursor to *Don’t You Want To Be Free*, Hughes’s 1934 collaboration with Ella Winter, *Harvest*, also drew on theatre strategies Hughes encountered in the Soviet Union and prominently featured women as political actors. Hughes and Winter wrote the play while Hughes was in Carmel, California, and the play dramatized a strike of an interracial group of agricultural workers. Leslie Sanders notes, in her article on Hughes and Russian theatre, that the playwrights’ prefatory note to the play “reads like a summary of techniques Hughes encountered

\textsuperscript{118} Hughes and Duffy, *The Political Plays of Langston Hughes*, 67.
\textsuperscript{119} Langston Hughes, *Folk Dramatist in the Protest Tradition, 1921-1943*, 143. Susan Duffy’s chronology in *The Political Plays of Langston Hughes* is a bit off. Duffy writes that Hughes wrote the play in Paris during the summer of 1937, went to Spain, and then returned to New York in September to an already operational Harlem Suitcase Theatre. However, Hughes and Thompson only founded the theatre after Hughes’s return from Spain in January 1938, and Hughes worked on *The Organizer* during his trip to Paris in 1938 (165).
in Russia.” The note specifies that the play “should give the effect of a mass play,” and:

Between scenes, a “newspaper” curtain might be used, reproducing actual portions of the reporting of the strike. Bits from the strikers’ handbills, or from the Vigilantes’ and growers’ advertisements could be flashed on the screen. (Such as the enclosed “Notice to the citizens of Tulare.”) If possible, one or two Filipinos might be included among the strikers to add to the melting pot of races that is California’s low-paid agricultural reserve. In the possession of the author is a huge album of pictures, clippings, leaflets, handbills, etc., of the strike. This material is at the disposal of the producer.

The use of newspaper and ephemera in the theatre set as well as the preparation of the play’s production resonates with the scrapbook and montage strategies that will be more fully explored in the next chapter. Harvest also indicates an earlier 1930s engagement with outspoken and politically savvy women characters, especially Jennie, who is secretary of the local, a leader in the cotton-pickers’ strike, and the focus of the play. She was reportedly based on the California activist Caroline Decker. Jennie is the spokesperson when arbitrators, police, academics, and government aid officials come to the strikers’ camp. Hughes and Winter make clear how men in power use sexuality to suppress women’s and workers’ agency, not only in private relationship, but in the public realm. The owners of the farm condemn Jennie, and undermine her political power by way of accusations of sexual deviancy, and threats to innocent women. They say, “Jennie Martin, she sweethearts with the whole bunch, greasers and all. That’s how she gets her hold on them! Our daughters have to live in the same town with that—It’s time we got our country cleaned up.”

More than one of the characters are enamored with Jennie, including a

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120 Sanders, “Interesting Ways of Staging Plays: Hughes and Russian Theatre.”
121 Hughes and Duffy, The Political Plays of Langston Hughes, 68.
122 Ibid., 200.
123 Ibid., 127–8.
local reporter, and farm worker named Jose, but her character does not fulfill any romantic plot lines. When vigilantes attack the strikers, Jose jumps in front of her, and is fatally shot. As he dies, he confesses his love for her “I love you, Comrade Jennie—like I love the revolution.” She tells him, “We were comrades, Jose. Companeros. That is the greatest love.”

Hughes collaborated with the jazz pianist and composer James P. Johnson on a later play, *The Organizer*. The play featured a woman organizer, albeit in a subservient role to the organizer featured in title of the play. A “concert version” was eventually produced by the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union’s (ILGWU) Negro Chorus and Symphony Orchestra as part of their 1940 convention, which coincided with the World’s Fair in Queens. Michael Denning notes “a radio version was rejected by CBS as ‘too controversial.’” The woman character appears before the organizer in the play. She knows the password to the sharecroppers’ meeting (“Jerico”), and bring leaflets and praise for the organizer. She rouses the group, (“Ten thousand bales of cotton to de landlord!/ How much was ours?”), and tells them about the organizer, anticipating his arrival almost messianically. One of her songs merges a conventional song about missing a man with political commitments. Her love interest is the organizer of the title:

Sometimes I’m lonely when he’s gone away,

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124 Ibid., 136.
125 When Johnson first contacted Hughes about the collaboration in 1937, he requested Hughes write in blank verse. But Hughes replied, objecting to blank verse: “Blank verse is the old Shakespearic form which would hardly be suitable for an entire opera libretto, although it might be used in parts” (quoted in Hughes and Duffy, *The Political Plays of Langston Hughes*, 164.). Hughes’s use of song and ballad form, with its short lines of trimeter and tetrameter, give some insight into his understanding of the suitability of certain kinds of form for popular, collective consumption and performance.
126 Ibid., 168.; The ILGWU famously produced the musical revue *Pins & Needles*, which was running at the time of this performance of *The Organizer*.
129 Ibid., 181.
But I keep thinking there will come a day.

When this man of mine will do

All the things he wanted to,

And the better world he’s dreamed of will come true.¹³⁰

Women activists in Hughes’s plays and poems cross the boundaries of public and private, and take collective action. Hughes positions women as key figures in agitating for political change within texts that prompt their audiences to take action. Though the plays don’t directly deal with the Spanish Civil War, they illuminate Hughes’s approach to intersectional, emancipatory politics, and share such strategies with his Spanish Civil War poems.

Hughes went on to revise Don’t You Want To Be Free for performance into the early 1960s. One notable revision was to the ending. Toward the end of the play one character says, “Riots won’t solve anything, will they brother?” and is answered, “No, riots won’t solve anything.” He asks, “Then what must we do?” In 1938, the answer is simple: “Organize.”¹³¹ In the early sixties the reply is much less confident: “I don’t know. I honest to God don’t know.”¹³² Though the method of making things better is less certain decades later, in both versions of the play Hughes creates an ending that rouses a collective response. In both versions, the audience joins in singing a song of interracial collaboration toward a new world.¹³³ In the 1938 version, “Who wants to come and join hands with me?/ Who wants to make one great unity?/ Who wants to say no more black or white?” And in the version from the sixties: “Oh, sing with me a new song!” “The new world of tomorrow/ will belong to you and me!” The play’s invitation to song and speech is a gesture not unlike those that Hughes extended in speeches, journalism, and

¹³⁰ Ibid., 183.
¹³¹ Hughes, “Don’t You Want to Be Free?.
¹³³ Ibid.
poetry, including his use of poetic forms like chant poetry, dialogic poems, ballads, and epistolary poems. This movement into action requires spectators to translate the provocation of the play into their own experience. This possibility of identification and action undergirds Hughes’s theatre, poetics, and his internationalism.

To read Don’t You Want to Be Free alongside Hughes’s poetry and prose, and to read it as a Spanish Civil War text, extends the range of intertextual and interpersonal connections we can make, bringing for example Lorca’s legacy as a poet and theatre director into the discourse of 1930s African-American theatre. Hughes founded a theatre for the masses, and staged a play that hailed audience members across gender and race, which asks not only Don’t You Want To Be Free? but also how can we help each other be freer. The gestures of reaching out and joining in collective action that Hughes put on stage in Don’t You Want To Be Free, like Johnny’s address from Spain to Alabama, should be seen as emblematic of his writing in the 1930s.

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We find “A Note from Spain” in Nancy Cunard’s papers, and its presence there, along with manuscripts of other poems and their letters surrounding publication projects and literary friendships, illuminates networks of correspondence and friendship that deepen our understanding of Hughes’s poetics during the Spanish Civil War and after. Their friendship lasted until the end of Cunard’s life. In 1963, Hughes wrote to Cunard, “There are only about 3 people I want to see in all of Europe—and you’re one.” Similarly, with Thompson, Hughes remained close. They signed letters to each other “Salud” for years and years following the Spanish Civil War. That these histories and texts from their papers were neglected can be seen as
an effect of political suppression during the Cold War, during which the veterans from the Abraham Lincoln Brigade were persecuted as “premature anti-fascists,” and Hughes was called to testify in front of the Senate HUAC Committee to account for his radical associations in the 1930s. Hughes wrote to Carl Murphy, the editor of the *Afro American*, in 1953, “Neither in the closed executive hearing of the sub-committee nor in the open hearing did the name of any of your newspapers occur, nor was I asked about my trip to Spain.”¹³⁴ This hole in Hughes scholarship must also be seen as part of the erasure of histories of black left feminism.

Hughes’s representations of women radicals in his writing from the Spanish Civil War prefigured his later representations of women activists in, for instance, the Simple stories, and *Panther and the Lash*. In 1974, Rita Dandridge commented that Hughes’s women characters, “attest to his social awareness that the black woman has not sat on the sidelines during the black liberation struggles of the twentieth-century, but has been actively engaged in the fight for her race's freedom.”¹³⁵ By recovering Hughes’s representations of women activists in the 1930s, we gain a fuller understanding of his attention to women active in internationalism, working class activism, and black liberation throughout his writing career. This attention to gender can be traced through writing from World War II, the Korean War, and Vietnam, in poems including: “Mother to Son,” “Mother and Son,” and especially in poems like “Official Notice” and “Without Benefit of Declaration” in *The Panther and the Lash*.¹³⁶

Women played central roles in the international networks of friendship and solidarity, newspaper networks, and small press publishing that saw literary work into existence and into circulation. Reading in the archives, we recognize the extent to which the hailing of women

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¹³⁴ Hughes to Carl Murphy, March 20, 1953, Langston Hughes Papers. James Weldon Johnson Collection in the Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.
¹³⁵ Dandridge, “The Black Woman as Freedom Fighter in Langston Hughes’ *Simple’s Uncle Sam,”* 274.
activists in the salutation “Dear Sis” and the affirmation in Sister Johnson’s declaration, “Here I am with my head held high” indicate a challenge to masculinist notions of proletarian literature. In the fight against fascism, Hughes worked with a number of important women activists, whose papers deepen our understanding of internationalism, feminism, and friendship.
CHAPTER THREE
Thyra Edwards’ And Nancy Cunard’s Spanish Civil War Scrapbooks

“‘Tu sembles être une pillouère née’--Georgette murmured, using the
Breton word for scavenger as I raked through everything for days.”¹ –
Nancy Cunard

The women with whom Langston Hughes was in contact in Spain, and who appeared in
the previous chapter, undertook their own documentary, journalistic, and literary projects in
support of the Spanish Republicans. This section will focus on two examples. Thyra Edwards
and Nancy Cunard each created scrapbooks on the Spanish Civil War that offer keen correctives
to mainstream histories of the Spanish Civil War.² Their accounts, created from newspaper
clippings, photographs, manuscripts, and letters, assemble the ephemera of a life to record an
account of anti-fascist and international organizing. The histories these texts capture are
unfamiliar, because their authors were not taken up as authorities on the war. As women, and as
women who were fellow travelers but not embedded in Communist Party politics, Cunard and
Edwards each offer an alternative history, an outsider archive to establish a record of the time.
Cunard’s scrapbook includes the legacy of Spanish exile in France after the war. Thyra Edwards’
scrapbook makes apparent the contributions of women organizers in the African American
Popular Front that rallied for Spanish Republicans. The scrapbook is a one-of-a-kind form with
links to autobiography—but it exceeds that genre.³ This chapter will consider the scrapbook as a

¹ Cunard, Grand Man, 207.
² Cosas de España. Edwards, Scrapbook. The discussion throughout refers to these texts.
³ I am sympathetic with Bartholomew Brinkman’s reading of Marianne Moore’s scrapbooks as “a model
modernist form in its own right—a form that can speak about exile, protest, and fascism.

Nancy Cunard’s scrapbook of “Spanish Things,” assembled after World War II, offers a corrective to many representations of the Spanish Civil War.\(^4\) It insists on a view of the war that encompasses both the war and its aftermath, including representations from the time of the civil war, and after. It also focuses firmly on Spanish writers, artists, and intellectuals during the war, not only the experience of foreigners in Spain. Moreover, Cunard’s scrapbook calls attention to its own incompleteness, the fragility of an anti-fascist archive, and its vulnerability to policing. The scrapbook begins with a note that the majority of Cunard’s materials from the war were destroyed during the “occupation-pillage” of her home in Reanville, in Normandy, during “the war of 1939-1945.” Her “Cosas de España” are not only the things contained in the book, but also those things lost under the boot of the occupying forces. Cunard makes the subject of this scrapbook the absences within the archive.

Thyra Edwards, the African-American social worker, traveled to Spain in 1937. While there, she worked with white Chicago social worker Constance Kyle to survey children’s colonies (for those displaced because of the civil war), reported on the war for the Associated Negro Press, and translated a poem by the Cuban poet Nicolas Guillén, who was also in Spain reporting on the war.\(^5\) When she returned to the United States, she went on a twenty-one city tour with Salaria Kee, the African-American nurse who served in Spain. They were part of a multifaceted campaign to raise funds for an ambulance to be sent to support. Thyra Edwards’ scrapbook documents a broad coalition of African American organizations engaged in fundraising for Spanish Republicans, including churches, B.Y.P.U.s [Baptist Young People’s Unions], Y.M.C.As, the African American fraternal organization the Black Elks, and the

\(^4\) Cunard, Cosas de España.
N.A.A.C.P., as well as organizations more explicitly connected with the Left. This history of Spanish Civil War organizing is not widely known; recovery of African American participation in and around the Spanish Civil War has largely emerged through relatively recent scholarship on the black Left and black radical traditions, leaving out a range of participants, diverse in geography, ideology, and gender.

In surveying these very different archive-making documentary projects, I hope to suggest that the historiography of the Spanish Civil War ought to be reconsidered from the point of view of these outsider archives. Thyra Edwards gathered her materials into a deliberate collection, to tell a story of African-American women’s radical, anti-fascist organizing in the 1930s. Cunard’s “Cosas de Espagne: 1936-1946” makes several important interventions: most importantly, calling out the absence of the material record in the wake of fascist war; but also insisting on a decade long view of the war that includes Spanish exile; and the placing Spanish intellectuals centrally in her telling.

The documentary-aims of these scrapbooks connect them to the notebooks of other political collectors like Virginia Woolf and Walter Benjamin, who collected fragments and scraps and assembled them to challenge the dominant culture. Cunard works in this tradition. Cunard's documentary work for Spain was certainly ammunition for a cause. Her “Cosas de Espana” is an exceptional document of the Spanish Civil War, that calls attention to the absences and silences in the historiography, bridging the war in Spain and exile in France during World War II, and demonstrates a network of committed writers: North and South American, French, British, and Spanish. Cunard's scrapbook is a map. It offers an alternate archive: an alternate history of the war and its aftermath. Returning to the scrapbook today, it prompts us to consider the history left under the boots of occupying soldiers, to consider the

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6 Marcus, *Art & Anger*, 75.
histories and friendships of which we cannot recover evidence, just as it insists on an attention to
the interconnected history of modernism and Spain.

NANCY CUNARD’S COSAS DE ESPAÑA

In 1949, the British writer Nancy Cunard made a scrapbook. She titled it, Cosas de España: 1936-1946 (Things from Spain). Cunard first arrived in Spain within the month of Franco’s July 1936 coup. She worked to make the Spanish Civil War immediate for readers across a range of
geographic, racial, and national divides. She reported on the war for the Chicago-based news agency, the Associated Negro Press. She wrote poems, published pamphlets of poetry, and organized questionnaires for Spain. When Franco’s forces defeated the Republic in 1939, she worked tirelessly for the refugees in French concentration camps on the border, and stayed connected with Spanish intellectuals and friends she had met. In the scrapbook, she uses fragments, the clippings and images that survived the war in Spain and the Nazi occupation of her home in Normandy, to create a map of war and exile. In this scrapbook, what is missing from the scrapbook is as important as what is present. Her scrapbook begins with a note, written in French:

All of these photos, et cetera, except the ones way in the back [of the scrapbook], have been literally under the boot of Germans during the occupation of France, which explains their state. As well as the fact that that which is gathered here is sparse and only represents a small bit. The immense proportion of photos, documents, souvenirs, personal items of the Spanish War that I possessed have disappeared because of the war of 1939-

\[7\] Cunard, Cosas de España.
\[8\] The two major published biographies of Cunard cover this activity at this time in Cunard’s life. Chisholm, Nancy Cunard; Gordon, Nancy Cunard.
1945, occupation-pillage in Réanville in Normandy.9

Cunard returned to her home in Réanville at the end of World War II to learn that the town’s collaborationist mayor, Germans, and local looters had raided her house.10 None of her neighbors’ homes were touched. Cunard, as an outspoken champion of African diasporic culture and peoples, a staunch antifascist and supporter of radical causes like the Spanish Republic, was a prominent target for fascists. They took aim at her collections. Cunard introduces this scrapbook as a document of what did not survive from under “the boot of the Germans.”

The German Jewish dissident Walter Benjamin wrote that the angel of history shudders forward into the future, facing backwards, with the detritus of the past turning up in its path. Benjamin wrote that this angel resides in all the things that he had to leave behind in exile, all that he has lost.11 Benjamin wrote this on the verge of the Holocaust, on the verge of his own persecution and death in Port Bou, in the Pyrenees, as he tried to escape Nazi Europe. The suitcase he carried with him to the border was never recovered. Benjamin’s final experience of exile overlaps with the geography of Cunard’s engagement with Spain. Port Bou was a common entry point to Spain for Republican sympathizers from abroad, as well as a point of exit during and after the Republican defeat. In 1939 and the early 1940s, Cunard spent time at the French concentration camps in the Pyrenees where Spanish Republican refugees. Within a few years, French Jews were held in these camps. The exiled German-Jewish artist Charlotte Salomon was sent to the French camp Gurs twice: once she was released, and the second time she was sent to

9 Cunard, Cosas de España. My translation from the original French: “Toutes ces photos, etc, sauf les toutes-dernières ont été littéralement sous la botte des allemands pendant l’occupation de la France, ce qui en explique l’état. Ainsi que le fait que ce qui est réuni ici soit si épars et ne représente que si peu. L’immense proportion des photos, documents, souvenirs personnels de la Guerre d’Espagne que je posèdais a disparu pour cause de guerre 1939-1945, occupation-pillage à Réanville en Normandie. Nancy Cunard, Fev.1949, La Mothe Fénelon, Lot, France.”

10 Gordon, Nancy Cunard, 302.

11 Benjamin, “Agesilaus Santander.” Benjamin et al., Walter Benjamin, “Agesilaus Santander”.
Auschwitz, where she died.\textsuperscript{12} Cunard’s scrapbook attempts to recover the pieces, to memorialize the lost things, and gather the scraps that turn up in the wake of war and exile.

At the end of the war in Spain, beginning at the end of January 1939, Cunard reported extensively on the concentration camps in the French Pyrenees. She appealed to her readers, primarily in the \textit{Manchester Guardian}, to send contributions for food and supplies, and to advocate for the release of those interned. In her early articles on the refugees, she described the road that crossed the border at Le Perthus. In one of her first dispatches, published in the \textit{Manchester Guardian} on January 28\textsuperscript{th}, 1939, she wrote:

\begin{quote}
Today there is not a vestige of the ‘picturesque’. It is all a welter of wretched faces, despairing and patient, while the French military, the Gardes Mobiles, the police and the Senegalese troops do their best to park them into some kind of formation. This is one of the most terrible Odysseys of history, and long will it be remembered, and unforgiven.
\end{quote}

In another account, she records the discarded belongings along the way: “Mattresses and blankets are already beginning to rot where they have been thrown away in the impossibility of carrying them further.”\textsuperscript{13} She describes the scene on the road as “Dantesque,”\textsuperscript{14} and in another report, as “a vision of hell”:

\begin{quote}
Immediately the wreckage begins. The rocks are literally draped with cast-off shreds of clothing; everything that man keeps body and soul together with lies strewn about here. A huge number of mattresses, pillows, broken shoes, an inchoate litter. A score of lorries and cars are half over the side of the drop; a typewriter sits on a bridge; near by a soldier asleep in an armchair; a man shaving himself in a cracked mirror.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{13} Cunard, Untitled Article TS, 31 January 1939.
\textsuperscript{14} Cunard, “Contrasts on French Frontier.”
\textsuperscript{15} Cunard, “The Great Retreat.”
\end{flushleft}
And when Cunard reports on Francoist troops reaching Le Perthus and raising their flag, she writes, “All I know is that, in a mood very far indeed from looking for symbolism, the last thing I saw yesterday on the roadside in Le Perthus was a broken guitar.”

Cunard looks backwards to the discarded belongings of the refugees, the detritus of exile, left in the wake of the journey into France. Like Benjamin’s angel of history, Cunard’s reportage prompts a sense of the present and future that is rooted in what is lost, pillaged, and destroyed in the movement of history.

Cunard launches an offensive in her Spanish Civil War scrapbook. Paula Rabinowitz has written that, in documentary projects, “What is at stake . . . is the status, meaning, interpretation, and perhaps even control of history and its narratives.” These are not the terms with which we normally consider scrapbooks, but Cunard’s calls for such an attention. Scrapbooks are commonly thought of as personal creations, akin to a diary or a calendar. They’re generally assembled chronologically, recording the life of an individual, or a family. Today, they might call to mind craft store aisles of colorful archival paper, decorative hole punches, and themed photo frames. A one-of-a-kind, un-reproducible document associated with autobiography and private memory, the form is hardly considered serious. Cunard's scrapbook, however, takes on history in a serious way. The prefatory note and captions, all in French, mark the book for a readership outside an intimate circle. Her use of French moreover signals the document toward a public in a nation that received thousands of Republican refugees and neighbored Francoist Spain until 1975. In 1949, the same year she made the scrapbook, she published a book of her poems in French about the Republican cause, Nous Gens d'Espagne (We

16 Cunard, Untitled Article TS, 9 Feb 1939.
17 Rabinowitz, They Must Be Represented, 7.
People of Spain).  

Reading for gaps in the record is the kind of work that scholars of women’s work, of colonized people, working class people, and people of color have to take up. The archive is always necessarily incomplete, but the particular histories and works that have been devalued, discarded, and destroyed have a particularly hard time surviving to make it into those institutions and knowledge-making, question-defining repositories. Considering the vast activity Cunard undertook for Spain, her scrapbook is striking for what is not evidenced. For a text intended to cover ten years of war and exile—during which the author of the scrapbook was deeply involved in writing and publishing poetry, reporting, fundraising, correspondence, and friendships—the pages collect tiny fragments. We know Cunard was in touch with many more people in Spain; visited many places; organized articles and publications. She worked in Paris and London, appealing for funds, sending poetry and journalism to publications there. But only a shadow of these activities shows up in the scrapbook. The contents of the scrapbook impress both for their broad range of representations and the absences. Cunard’s scrapbook, assembled from what survived from under the boot of those that targeted her home, may give us some lessons in how to create a deliberate document of history, as it calls out the history of violence and fascism within the life of the papers assembled.

The multivocal form of Cunard’s scrapbook seems resonant with the forms of anthologies she created. Most famous was her 1934 *Negro* anthology, and she also undertook a number of projects related to Spain that assembled a variety of voices. She created, with Pablo Neruda, a series of poetry pamphlets, *Les Poètes du Monde Défendent le Peuple Espagnol* (The Poets of the World Defend the Spanish People) that published authors from Europe and the Americas. She also made *Authors Take Sides On the Spanish Civil War*, in which well known writers and

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intellectuals, including Rebecca West, Ezra Pound, George Padmore, and Mulk Raj Anand, responded to her questionnaire: “Are you for, or against, the legal Government and the People of Republican Spain? Are you for, or against, Franco and Fascism?” The collection of answers was published in the *Left Review.* Some of the materials from *Authors Take Sides* and the *Poets of the World* series, including the handwritten manuscript of Auden's “Spain,” survived the war. Cunard assembled them in a dossier separate from the *Cosas de España* scrapbook. That collection also begins with a note about its incompleteness. She explains what is assembled is only a few of the “150 to 200” letters in response to the questionnaire. The note explains: “ALL OF THE OTHERS DISAPPEARED DURING WORLD WAR II, IN MY HOUSE AT REANVILLE IN NORMANDY. THE CONDITION OF THESE IS DUE TO DIRT AND DAMAGE DURING THE OCCUPATION OF MY HOUSE.”

The Spanish Civil War materials were not the only loss during what she called the *occupation-pillage* of her home. Her collection of African art was plundered and vandalized. She lost proofs, manuscripts, letters from writers and artists, and artifacts from her anthology *Negro,* and from the Hours Press, which she ran out of her home, and where she published Laura Riding, Ezra Pound, Samuel Beckett, and a musical score by Henry Crowder, with a cover by Man Ray. Cunard recalled in *Grand Man,* her book on Norman Douglas, “not a door, not a window remained . . . everything I had was here, and now almost all was gone.” This ruination of her home, by all accounts, devastated her—not only the loss of art, manuscripts, and letters, but also the betrayal of her neighbors, shocked her. She eventually moved to the south of France, to a house in La Mothe. Her effort to assemble these fragments in the scrapbook, then, is as much a historiographic intervention as a defense against the loss of her

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20 Cunard, *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish Civil War.*
21 Cunard, Nancy. Questionnaire about Spain.
22 Cunard, *Grand Man,* 207.
home.

The scrapbook begins with a series of photographs and clippings from Madrid. Cunard labels a photo of a man leaning out a window shouting down to the street, two rifles over his shoulder, “Le début - à Madrid (?) Juillet 1936.” On the same page there’s a map of Spain, which Cunard has labeled “Aôut 1936,” that demarcates Republican and Nationalist held territories. Several snapshots present calm, static images of posed portraits and streetscapes: a man in overalls; a woman sitting on a wall; a couple standing in a yard in front of a home, with their dog; a doorway with a bicycle leaning against the wall.

On the following page of the scrapbook, Cunard places a letter from a Comisario Especial, and a photograph of three people in republican caps. A map of Madrid, and a photograph of Cunard, captioned “N in Madrid, Oct. 1936. Taken by William Forrest,” follows. Forrest was a fellow journalist, who reported on the war for the Daily Express, and later the News Chronicle. Cunard also includes an account of her meeting with the Acting British Consul when she went to renew her passport. She notes in a caption above the narrative that the Consul spoke “with the utmost bias against the Republic.”

The scrapbook then shifts abruptly in tone, from documenting the optimism and excitement of the “debut” of the war, and Cunard telling the consul “there is a great deal I want to learn about here,” to the stark image of a dead child. The scrapbook’s first image of a dead child, eyes and mouth open, morgue number laid across her bloodied chest, is the very famous one that appeared on a poster by the Republican Ministerio de Propoganda, montaged with

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23 Cunard, Cosas de España.
planes flying overhead. Though the image had become iconic, and highly symbolic, Cunard records the details of the death precisely: “Un des enfants tués par le bombardement aérien de l’école à Getafe, Oct 1936” (One of the children killed by the aerial bombing of the school in Getafe). The politics of showing the photographs of dead children is uncontroversial in Cunard’s scrapbook. Virginia Woolf repeatedly described the images of “dead children and ruined houses” sent from Spain but refused to show them in Three Guineas. However, such photographs appear in the scrapbook without apology, as they did in Sylvia Pankhurst’s weekly London newspaper The New Times and Ethiopia News, on the board of which Cunard served. The scrapbook then presents a photograph of a building reduced to a skeletal structure, which Cunard captions “Madrid Nov 1936.” Facing that image is a typescript of Haitian poet Jacques Roumain’s “Madrid (1936),” followed by Cunard’s translation from the French. The poem mirrors the image of the dead child: “mais oui il y a sur le visage sanglant de cet enfant un sourire/ comme un grenade écrasée à coupe de talon” (There is, yes there is/ On the torn and bloodied face of that child/ A smile, like a pomegranate crushed under the tramp of a heel). As a writer, Cunard literally and figuratively translated accounts of Republican Spain to readers in Spain, France, England and the African diaspora, in her writing and publication projects.

On the next page, Cunard includes evidence of the Republican war effort abroad: a printed notice of a talk on Madrid in Paris by the writers Tristan Tzara and Georges Soria, in December and January. Below that notice, there is a postcard of the famous illustration of “Los Nacionales” in a boat—its passengers a military general, a bishop, an aristocrat, and several

25 On one famous poster version, the montaged image is framed by the text, “Madrid. The ‘military’ practice of the rebels. If you tolerate this your children will be next.” Berman, Modernist Commitments, 74.
26 See: Marcus’s introduction to Woolf, Marcus, and Hussey, Three Guineas; Dalgarno, Virginia Woolf and the Visible World, 164–5; Marcus, Art & Anger.
colonial mercenaries. There is also a photograph of a dead child and mother, captioned, “Les Morts, bombardés. Madrid. Hiver, 1936” (The Dead, bombed. Madrid, Winter, 1936). The postcard, the photograph, and the ad for the lecture represent forms that helped circulate the Republican war effort abroad.

Cunard places on the following pages photos of an exhibition in Valencia of art rescued from the Duc d’Alba’s palace, after its bombardment by the Nationalists. Such Republican efforts to preserve art were often circulated in the press as evidence of the strong cultural values of the Republic. Another postcard (“Los Internacionales unidos a los Españoles luchamos contra el invasor.” The Internationals unite with the Spanish struggle against the invador) employs the common rhetoric of posing the Francoists as foreign invaders. A neighboring image of “détail de la défaite italienne. Mai 1937” (detail of the Italian defeat. May 1937) at Guadalajara highlights the Italian involvement with Franco’s forces. A postcard with a portrait of Julio Alvarez del Vayo, the Republican Minister of Foreign Affairs, and several wartime posters follow, including a photograph of Guernica, the infamous site of civilian bombing, and Picasso’s painting beside it, which Cunard captions with an approximated Basque spelling, Guernika. This pairing makes another transition within the scrapbook’s narrative—from wartime Spain, and its destruction, to the Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la vie Moderne in Paris, where Republican Spain’s Pavilion first exhibited Picasso’s famous painting in the summer 1937.

The scrapbook includes several images of the Spanish Pavilion, including the mercury fountain labeled “Modèle fait par Alexander Calder,” and a postcard of a photomural on Spanish agriculture and land distribution by Josep Renau, one of several that ran through the pavilion.27

27 Mendelson, Documenting Spain, 154. Mendelson’s caption includes identifying information for the photomural: “Josep Renau, photomural, L’agriculture espagnole reposait sur: Des salaires miserable,
The Congress of Writers for the Defense of Culture coincided with the Paris Exhibition, and Cunard includes a photograph of Jacques Roumain, Ramon Sender, and herself in Paris, framed by signatures of the Sender, Roumain, the Cuban poet and journalist Nicolas Guillén, and the African American poet Langston Hughes. The page is captioned “Juillet 1937 au moment du Congrès des Ecrivains pour la Defense de la Culture apres ses sessions en Espagne” (July 1937 at the moment of the Congress of Writers for the Defense of Culture, after its sessions in Spain)—the Congress met in Madrid and Valencia prior to arriving in Paris. Though she doesn’t include it in the scrapbook, Cunard wrote an article for the Left Review on speeches by Hughes, Roumain, and Guillén at the Writers’ Congress. Cunard’s efforts to publish and befriend African diasporic as well as Spanish writers make her an exceptional modernist figure and an exceptional figure among white anglophone recorders of the Spanish Civil War. The following page includes a 1949 review from News Review of the English translation of Sender’s novel The King and the Queen, set during the civil war.

In the fall of 1937, Cunard returned to Spain. The scrapbook records this time with photographs of a C.G.T. (Confederación General del Trabajo) Home for refugee children, one of a Yugoslav volunteer, Cyril Camilovitch, and another of Cunard and Sender, sitting under a tree, dated October 1937. John Banting, the British artist who had also travelled with Cunard to the U.S. earlier in the decade while she was compiling the anthology Negro, joined Cunard on this return to Spain. Cunard includes drawings by John Banting in the scrapbook. In the first, a waiter, dressed in a suit and holding a tray of drinks, remarks to his colleague, “At this round

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28 Cunard, “Three Negro Poets.”
29 This is perhaps the “Cyrille” who signs a postcard to Hughes, along with Cunard and Sender (22 October) in Hughes, Cunard, and Patterson, Poetry, Politics, and Friendship in the Spanish Civil War, 25.
they always start crying about the loyalists in Spain.” At the top of the illustration, Cunard has translated this remark into French: “A cette tournée-ci qu’ils commencent toujours à pleurer sur les Espagnols Republicains.” Banting takes aim at well-off sympathizers abroad who support the Republicans from afar, but do not take action, especially not to change their class position.

The second sketch illustrates a more engaged and rather enchanted model for international solidarity. It depicts Banting and Cunard in Spain, travelling between cities in an official car, and is captioned “1937 to 1938 in a Camion, Madrid—Valencia, To Nancy from Juanito. Salud!” In the corner, Cunard annotated this inscription, clarifying the identity of Juanito, “by John Banting.” Their time in Valencia was eventful. They met Hughes, and the African American nurse Salaria Kee. Banting recalled later, “By official car we went to beautiful Valencia, where we met Langston Hughes—a magnificent and a magnetising man—with his sense of humanity and wide understanding of life. I wish we had seen him more often.”

Hughes wrote to Nancy, suggesting that she meet Kee: “The Negro nurse, Salaria Kee, and her Irish husband, are stopping at the Victoria just down the street until tomorrow. I think you’d like to meet them—and they, you.” In article for the Associated Negro Press, Cunard wrote of her visit with Kee, “We sat drinking coffee with an English friend in one of the big cafes of Valencia, where no shades of jimbrow can enter. Salaria (I must call her that, because I think we both feel we became friends that very first meeting) smiled and said to me, aside: ‘I could not go South with him,’” referring to her Irish husband.

Banting’s drawing features a merry group, fists raised in Republican salute, scarves blowing in the wind, with a red hammer and sickle on the side of the car. A long winding, raised road going into the distance takes up the right side of the drawing, is, a raised road. There’s

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30 Ford, *Nancy Cunard*, 182.
31 Hughes, Cunard, and Patterson, *Poetry, Politics, and Friendship in the Spanish Civil War*, 25.
32 Cunard, “Nurse in Heroic Role.”
minimal use of color in the drawing: red Soviet hammer and sickle, brown hoods of the travelers, and in the background, green softly rolling hills, and blue and pink clouds. The drawing has an air of excitement and hope. The figures’ eyes are closed, fists raised, smiling into the wind. Banting’s celebratory drawing, however, is followed by some less hopeful images in the scrapbook.

The scrapbook condenses time, making it impossible to view the war without simultaneously keeping in mind its aftermath. The illustration by John Banting, full of whimsy and an almost carefree excitement, is followed by a series of photographs of Bagaria, the famous Spanish caricaturist, and Narcisa Garcia Mundet at Cunard’s home in Réanville, in July 1938. Bagaria went into exile after drawing many antifascist illustrations and covers for El Sol and España. A document of both the war and its aftermath, the scrapbook resists the typical trajectory of Spanish Civil War works. Jessica Berman notes, “the rigid division of Civil War narratives into contemporaneous and retrospective can also keep us from seeing continuities and dialogues between and among these writings.”

As the end of the war approaches, the transition to Republican exile begins in the scrapbook’s pages. On the following page, Cunard inserted a manuscript of her poem “To Eat To-Day,” stamped by Republican censors, and annotated with a note that it was published in October 1938. Cunard’s poem “To Eat To-Day” considers a bombing. It stages the conversation of German bombers in the mess hall after an attack. It describes their civilian mark: “nothing but salt and a half-pint of olive,/ Nothing else but the woman.” The poem captures the implications of European non-intervention in Spain, as well as the movement toward European war:

“Europe’s nerve strung like a catapult, the cataclysm roaring and swelling…//But in Spain, no

33 Berman, Modernist Commitments, 190.
Perhaps, and Tomorrow—in Spain it is, Here.” The link that Cunard makes in this poem, between the bombings in Spain and the impending war in Europe, with “Another country arming, another and another behind it—,” prepares the transition that happens over the next pages of the scrapbook, in which we move out of Spain, across the French border, to coverage of the camps in France, and life of Republican exiles in Europe.

Cunard wrote tirelessly about these camps. “Practically the whole élite of Spain’s intellectuals—scientists, men of letters and the arts, musicians, architects, doctors, journalists, as well as State Officials, Civil Servants and Republican Military commanders and officers are interned in the infamous concentration camps today at Argelès, St Cyprien, Les Haras, Le Boulou and all the others in the department of the Pyrénées Orientales,” she wrote in one article.34 Several pages of the scrapbook include clippings of photographs from the French press on concentration camps in France, where Spanish Republican refugees and International Brigade soldiers were interned.

She advocated for the release of numbers of people from the camps. Angel Goded, a waiter in the Hotel Majestic who Cunard befriended in Barcelona in 1936, ended up in the camp in Argèles, and wrote to Cunard, “The biggest favor I have ever yet asked in my life. I am counting on you to get me out of here, and I know you will.”35 She got him out and four others, “César Arconada, the well-known Spanish poet” and “an architect, a cartoonist and a publisher.”36 She secured their release from the camp, but encountered difficulties on the journey to Réanville when they were all arrested in Paris, and the Spaniards sent back to the South, before Cunard again negotiated for their release.37 The scrapbook displays photos of these men

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34 Cunard, Untitled Article TS, 16 Feb 1939.
35 Chisholm, Nancy Cunard, 254.
36 Ibid., 255.
37 Ibid.
and other Spanish intellectuals at Cunard’s home. Cunard’s caption on a page of photographs from “Réanville Avril 1939” provides a comment on the timing of their stay, a list of their names, and a note that the Spanish avant garde writers Maria Teresa Leon and Rafael Alberti also visited.

Unlike mainstream canons of modernism and her male English counterparts, Cunard raises Spanish writers’ voices and remains fixed on their writing and lives throughout their exile. Cunard’s attention to Spanish writers is noteworthy, particularly for an anglophone recorder of this history, where accounts by Hemingway, Orwell, and Auden normally overshadow Spanish writers who suffered what Jessica Berman describes as “double defeat, censored, ostracized from continental literary movements and cast into the diaspora.”

On the facing page, photos of the camp at Barcarès make a jarring juxtaposition with the calm, spacious photos of Réanville. There’s a photo of uniformed soldiers standing at the camp’s gate, one on bicycle. From the edge of the photo, a man in an undershirt looks over his shoulder. In another photo, a man only in underwear sits in a circle of men, his leg fully exposed. There’s a photo of the sign for an “exposition d’art dans un des camps” (art exhibition in one of the camps). These pages also include photos of Spanish exiles, Nitti and others, in French cities.

The scrapbook is relatively silent during World War II. When France was occupied by the Nazis, Cunard went to Chile to visit Neruda, and then travelled through Mexico, the Caribbean, and the U.S. (where she was forbidden to depart the ship, but a group of friends met her at the pier in Brooklyn) to London, where she lived for three years. She worked for Le Francais de Grand-Bretagne in 1942, listening to broadcasts from French and translating them into English, and the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF), marking and

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38 Berman, *Modernist Commitments*, 187–8. Berman points out the “marginalization of Spanish writers chronicling the war that took place on their own soil"
translating articles of interest for the French in exile.\textsuperscript{39} With George Padmore, Cunard wrote and published the anticolonial pamphlet \textit{White Man's Duty} (1943). She also edited an anthology, \textit{Poems for France} (1944). When she returned to France from England at the end of the war, she found her home in Réanville ransacked. She eventually moved to La Mothe, in the south of France. The scrapbook omits the years in the Americas and London, and moves quickly from August 1939 to 1946. World War II is another event represented by absence in this documentary project. Cunard’s friend Walter Strachan recalled this time in Cunard’s life, when she devoted herself to France, and then, again, to Spain:

As all her friends know she worked feverishly for France during its darkest days, then as the situation there seemed more hopeful she rallied once more to her beloved Spain with whose Republican cause she had identified herself actively during the civil war. In a letter dated ‘Aug. 24’ 1946 she wrote ‘Yes, Andorra. Five weeks there and much of it quite wonderful…As you know, I am ENTIRELY occupied with “the things of Spain” and shall not be back in Paris…Literary matters are simply a dead letter to me these times. Not for ever though…’ Emerging from this Spanish period were her poems \textit{NOUS GENS D’ESPAGNE} 1945-49, remarkable poems in French (for an English woman)—written with the heart as well as the head.\textsuperscript{40}

The letter he quotes indicates her deep attention to Spain in the postwar, and his comment links her activism with the poems she published afterwards on Spain. “The things of Spain” that occupied Cunard eventually manifested in volumes of poetry, a book project, and the arrangement of her personal archive in the scrapbook.

The scrapbook’s jumps in chronology happen without announcement. From the summer

\textsuperscript{39} Gordon, \textit{Nancy Cunard}, 280–281.  
\textsuperscript{40} Ford, \textit{Nancy Cunard}.  

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of 1939, Cunard includes copies of a letter from the Spanish Ambassador in Britain, the Duke of Alba, to H.G. Wells, in response to a letter from members of the group “For Intellectual Liberty,” who, Cunard explained in a note at the top of Alba’s reply, wrote “on the score of the condemnation of the two eminent Spanish Republicans, MIGUEL HERNANDEZ, the poet, and the philosopher Angel GAOS (or his brother?).” The pro-Nationalist Duke responded by defending Franco’s fairness. On the following page, Gustavo Mezón appears in several photographs; in one, he holds a refugee child in Lot in 1939; in another, captioned 1946, he wears a military uniform. This group of photos signals a quick transition to the post-World War II years. There’s a photograph signed by the famous Catalan cellist, “A Nancy Cunard. --Pau Casals,” dated summer 1946. Photographs from a 1945 inauguration of a memorial for the poet Antonio Machado, who died in Collioure in 1939, attended by Tristan Tzara and Juan Miguel Romá, and photographs of other Spanish exiles in France in 1946, fill out the last pages of the scrapbook, the pages “toutes-derrières” that avoided the occupier’s boot. The scrapbook ends with a postcard that declares, “les amis de l’Espagne Republicaine aide a la Lutte Clandestine, Mai 1946” (the friends of Republican Spain help the Underground Struggle, May 1946). Cunard also continued to fight against Francoist Spain in years after the end of World War II, returning to the country several times. She continued to work on her epic poem, and assembled a manuscript for a book on Spain in 1957, which she described as “a record or what-you-will that I cannot describe otherwise than as Loose leaves from Spain.”

In the Cosas de España scrapbook, Cunard gathers her things from Spain to continue the struggle against Franco. No melancholy reflection on the war, it presents the Republican effort as ongoing. The scrapbook is a weapon. Like her fellow political scavengers Virginia Woolf and

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41 Cunard, Untitled book on Spain. Nancy Cunard Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, Box 1, folder 2.
Walter Benjamin, Cunard assembled fragments and scraps to challenge dominant accounts of history. Jane Marcus wrote that Woolf and Benjamin “were like robbers making attacks on history” as they collected clippings in their notebooks.42 In a newspaper article Frederick Douglass authored, he instructed his African-American readers to “Save this extract. Cut it out and put it in your Scrap-book,” and “use it at the proper time.”43 Ellen Gruber Garvey notes that Douglass’s call “suggested that the clipping itself could be ammunition for a cause.”44 Cunard works in this tradition. Cunard's documentary work for Spain was certainly ammunition for a cause. Its account spans the war in Spain and exile in France, and demonstrates a network of committed writers from North and South America, France, Britain, and especially Spain. It offers an alternate archive, an alternate history of the war and its aftermath. Cosas de España is an exceptional document of the Spanish Civil War, which calls out the absences and silences in the historiography, in order to bolster the ongoing struggle against Franco.

THYRA EDWARDS’ SCRAPBOOK AS POLITICAL WOMEN’S LIFE WRITING

Thyra Edwards’ Spanish Civil War scrapbook exists in a semi-disassembled state in the Chicago History Museum.45 Between two green covers, the pages hold newspaper clippings, some attached, some tucked between pages. The detached articles leave behind a rectangle of glue on the page that once held it. The newspaper clipping is the medium of this history. The scrapbook assembles clippings on Edwards’ work in Spain, her tour of U.S. cities with the African American nurse Salaria Kee, and other fundraising efforts that followed her return to the United States. Edwards’ scrapbook documents a broad coalition of African American

42 Marcus, Art & Anger, 75.
43 Garvey, Writing with Scissors, 131.
44 Ibid.
organizations engaged in fundraising for Spanish Republicans, including churches, YMCAs, NAACP chapters, and the Black Elks. This history of Spanish Civil War organizing is not widely known. When African American participation in the Spanish Civil War has been recovered it has been through scholarship on the black Left and black radical traditions. Thyra Edwards’ scrapbook suggests even broader black participation. In addition to the broad swath of African American participation, the role of women in this history is little known, and Edwards makes it the focus of her scrapbook. She made feminist concerns central to her arguments for the relevance of the war in Spain to African American audiences. Like Cunard’s, this scrapbook is a kind of autobiography that is self-conscious in its historical record-keeping.

I read Thyra Edwards’ scrapbook in the context of other African American scrapbook projects, particularly her contemporary, the Harlem book collector and renowned scrapbook enthusiast, Alexander Gumby. Gumby saw his scrapbooks as supplements to an insufficient historical record in the mainstream. He remarked in an article for the Columbia Library World, “Negro history is recorded, if at all, as a Ripley’s Believe it Or Not.” Edwards, like Gumby, culls black and mainstream media to create an alternative history text. Ellen Gruber Garvey outlines a rich history of African American scrapbook culture that runs from the late nineteenth century to the twentieth century in the recent Writing With Scissors. In 1886, Gertrude Dustill Mossell called scrapbooks “unwritten histories,” and encouraged her readers to create these histories. In late 19th century Philadelphia, Joseph W.H. Carthard and William Dorsey created hundreds of scrapbooks. In the twentieth century, the importance of the scrapbook is evident in the black press. The black weekly The Chicago Defender encouraged “a Negro history scrapbook to be made of news clippings that tell of interesting Negro accomplishments” for

47 Garvey, Writing with Scissors, 137.
48 Ibid., 143.
school libraries. The Defender also gave prizes for children’s scrapbooks made as gifts for patients in black hospitals.

Before Edwards went to Spain, she wrote to Barnett, the editor of the Chicago-based Associated Negro Press, the news agency that syndicated articles to black newspapers around the world and for which Nancy Cunard also wrote. Edwards had written articles for the Associated Negro Press during her travels in Scandinavia, Russia, Austria, and Germany in 1935, and she would write for the ANP in Spain in 1937, and Mexico in 1938, as well as from home in Chicago, reporting on poverty and joblessness. (She was also romantically involved with Barnett years prior.) Spain was officially off-limits to Americans. U.S. passports were stamped “NOT VALID FOR TRAVEL IN SPAIN” during the war. In order to facilitate a visit, Edwards got press credentials from the ANP. She wrote to Barnett, “the fact that you have already had two representatives doesn’t matter. The Afro American of Baltimore has had a succession of them. And Nancy Cunard is not there now.” Edwards managed to reach Spain, traveling from Paris. She visited children’s colonies, camps where displaced children lived, and reported on the conditions there. She visited Salaria Kee with Langston Hughes, translated a poem for Nicolas Guillén, and wrote articles. Edwards returned to the U.S. and maintained engaged with the Spanish cause, taking a public role as spokesperson and fundraiser. After the fundraising tour with Kee, Edwards traveled in Mexico, and joined a group of Spanish republican refugees on their train journey. She reported on their experiences and quality of life. This extension of her social work and journalism in Mexico also extended her engagement with Republican Spain.

Edwards’ contributions to Spanish Civil War organizing were clearly recognized by the

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49 Ibid., 169. Prominent figures including Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell, John Edward Bruce, Jack Johnson, Pauline Hopkins, Anna Julia Cooper, Alice Dunbar Nelson, all created scrapbooks.
50 Marcus, “Race on the Wire: Nancy Cunard’s War Stories.”
51 Edwards, Correspondence with Barnett.
black press at the time, but have largely been forgotten since. In addition to reporting, Edwards was also the subject of reporting in the black press. Like Kee, she had a public profile. A Knoxville newspaper headlined an article about her upcoming speech, “Internationally Famous Woman To Deliver Lecture Here During Three Day Visit.” The lede describes her as an “internationally known lecturer and director of tours to European and Mexican countries.” Her self-archiving, and her recording of the life of Salaria Kee, indicates the role of the newspaper in her navigation of the public realm. Her scrapbook makes clear that she took seriously the power of the press, and the black press. The variety and number of clippings in the scrapbook make apparent the level of press coverage their fundraising efforts received, and how geographically widespread black newspapers were at this time. Many of the articles on Edwards and Kee’s tour were syndicated by the Associated Negro Press, and they include articles authored by prominent journalists of the day, including Edwards herself, Marvel Cooke, Nancy Cunard, Tim Poston, Richard Wright, Constance Kyle, and others.

One page of the scrapbook has four iterations of the article, “Spanish Consul Gives Reception for War Nurse,” an ANP story, collected from papers in San Antonio, Tulsa, and Tampa. Edwards’ scrapbook demonstrates the mechanics of the newspaper age, and a golden age in black newspapers. On another page of the scrapbook, three identical photos of Salaria Kee appear, with unique captions and typographical styles indicating their provenance in different papers. The serial, repeating image acts as an emblem of Edwards’ savviness in engaging the public realm.

Edwards records her own and Kee’s public profiles in the scrapbook, using a typically private, autobiographical form to record a history that would otherwise be, and has otherwise largely

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52 From a clipping in Thyra Edwards’ scrapbook.
53 The same photo was also used for a postcard in Edwards’ papers, to add a further layer of reproduction.
been, overlooked. To get some of the clippings, Edwards employed the services of a clipping bureau. The serialization and collation on the pages of the scrapbook (with the help of the thoroughly modern institution of the clipping bureau) provide a visual account of the age of mechanical reproduction and those technologies’ utility for creating and circulating alternate histories, particularly for African Americans with the black press of the 1930s.\(^{54}\) This scrapbook is not a personal archive of sights seen, meals eaten, people met, letters received. The scrapbook provides an alternative archive, and one that is outwardly turned.

Edwards documented women’s lives not only as the creator of this scrapbook but also as the author of a short biography of Salaria Kee, published as a pamphlet titled, “A Negro Nurse in Republican Spain.” Notably, the pamphlet did not credit Edwards as author. As Woolf wrote in *A Room of One’s Own*, “I would venture to guess than Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman.” Walt Carmon’s review of the pamphlet identifies the author, however. He writes, “This pamphlet is unsigned, but we may as well give credit where it is due. It’s the work of Thyra Edwards, Chicago Social worker and field organizer of the Medical Bureau and North American Committee and it’s one of the swellest pamphleteering jobs in many a day.” Edwards included a clipping of the review in the scrapbook. Edwards’ scrapbook and her biographical work on Kee indicate that she recognized the importance of the work they were doing to circulate information about the war against fascism in Spain to African American audiences. As such, Edwards’ work should be considered as an important model of black womens’ life writing.

In a foundational text of feminist autobiography criticism, *Writing a Woman’s Life*,

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\(^{54}\) Garvey makes an extremely compelling case for the clippings bureau as a fundamentally modern institution, and a precursor to digital technology and databases. She points out the clipping bureau broke down a newspaper into units of data (as a scrapbook also did) that could be reorganized. Garvey, *Writing with Scissors*, 253.
Carolyn Heilbrun writes, “there is no model for the female who is recounting a political narrative. There are no recognizable career stages in such a life, as there would be for a man. Nor do women have a tone of voice in which to speak with authority.” She cites Ida Tarbell, Jane Adams, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, as examples of women who privately worked hard to advance their cause, but in their public narration attributed success in politics to chance rather than deliberate effort. Though feminist scholars of women’s life writing tend to mark the genre’s emergence in the 1970s, if we look to ephemeral forms, we find earlier examples of women writing women’s lives. Edwards’ record of her own accomplishments in the scrapbook and her narration of Salaria Kee’s life in “A Negro Nurse in Republican Spain” do not shy from presenting women’s political commitment. Her account of Kee’s life in that pamphlet is exceptionally political, marking landmark moments of Kee’s developing political consciousness. In fact, it doesn’t even mention her marriage in Spain. The pamphlet tells us that, in high school, Kee fought for the right to play basketball as a black athlete; as a nursing student in Harlem Hospital, she stood up to segregation in the staff cafeteria; as a nurse there, she organized for better hospital conditions. From that preparation, and Kee’s involvement in the Ethiopian antifascist fundraising, her service in Spain came naturally. The narratives that Edwards assembles in the pamphlet and in the scrapbook evidence a consistent, purposeful political commitment.

Scholars tend to locate twentieth century radical women of color feminism in later decades, but, as Erik McDuffie’s Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American

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55 Heilbrun, Writing a Woman’s Life, 25.
56 Ibid., 24–25.
57 For instance, Garvey’s chapter on women suffragist scrapbooks deals with their strategies of navigating political work with gender expectations on the pages of their personal scrapbooks. Garvey, Writing with Scissors, 172.
58 Democracy et al., A Negro Nurse in Republican Spain.
Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism and Gregg Andrews’ recent biography of Edwards demonstrate, there were important public and sustained articulations of what Louise Thompson termed in 1936 the “triple exploitation” of African-American women—“as workers, as women, and as Negroes.”

Among the ephemera in Edwards’ papers are other examples of works I believe she authored that link feminist aims to the antiracist and antifascist cause of Spain. I suspect Edwards was the author of a pamphlet announcing the launch of “The Negro Ambulance Fund.” The fund was announced at a dinner honoring Louise Thompson, another African American woman organizer who travelled to Spain. The text of the pamphlet begins by linking Spain to the Ethiopian cause. Mussolini’s attack on Ethiopia was an important precursor to the internationalist, antifascist organizing on behalf of Spain for African Americans. The pamphlet reads, “Ethiopia was lost but the enemy, the same Fascist Mussolini, moved on to attack Spain…Those who feel keenly the loss of Ethiopia and who look toward its ultimate recovery must recognize that the struggle now waged in Spain is against the same enemy—Fascism.”

Among the points the flier goes on to make, the third is “Fascism stands for the subordination of women. Mussolini and Hitler have established that women have one exclusive function: To bear children for soldiers for the State.” Its final point, in bold, declares the threat of fascism for all sorts of groups, including ones associated with women’s participation: “Under Fascist government not only trade unions are liquidated but fraternities, women’s federations, lodges, cooperatives, and peace organizations.” The range of organizations invoked, and the attention to women’s organizations, is consistent with Edwards’ strategy in organizing her tour with Salaria Kee. The back of the flier includes photographs of African Americans in Spain, all

59 Thompson, “Toward a Brighter Dawn.”
of which include women: “Captain Basil Cueria and Major General El Campeseno Entertain Langston Hughes and Louise Thompson,” “Oliver Law, American Negro Soldier with the International Brigade Killed in Action in Loyalist Spain,” flanked by three unidentified women, and, finally, “Thyra Edwards and Constance Kyle, Delegates from the Social Workers’ Committee—at a Children’s colony in Barcelona, Spain.” The pamphlet presents a feminist angle on the Spanish Civil War. This expanded view of African American involvement in the Spanish Civil War should contribute to scholarly discourse around gender, the black Left, and the Spanish Civil War. Edwards was a feminist advocate and historian of the Spanish Civil War.

Historiography of the Spanish Civil War from American and African American perspectives has tended to emphasize the vigorous support of the U.S. Left, recovered after the Cold War suppression of Abraham Lincoln Brigade veterans (who were persecuted in the McCarthyite 1950s as ‘premature antifascists’), and the history of the U.S. Left broadly. The scholarship that recovered the history of the involvement of Americans in Spain tended to represent the experiences of men who traveled to Spain to fight for Spain, many involved in communist politics or trade unions. Renewed attention to African Americans who travelled to Spain has recovered accounts of volunteer soldiers (somewhere between 80 and 100 men, including Oliver Law and Milton Herndon, both of whom died in Spain), medics (like oral surgeon Arnold Donawa and nurse Salaria Kee), and public intellectuals (like Langston Hughes and Paul Robeson). These recuperated histories have also focused new attention on organizations on the Left. Several scholars in the late decades of the twentieth century have done work to recover the influence of the Left in American and African American politics and culture. Brent Edwards described the historiographic turn of the 1980s and 1990s that revealed “interacting and

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61 This photo was also published in the *Baltimore Afro-American*, accompanying one of Hughes’s articles.
overlapping forces” from black nationalist to Third and Fourth Internationalist in twentieth century black organizing. Robin Kelley, an important figure in this move to reconsider African American engagement with the Communist Party, noted such a convergence in his introduction to *It Ain’t Ethiopia But It’ll Do*. Kelley noted “African American volunteers [in Spain] were as much the creation of American communism as of black nationalism, as much the product of African American folk culture as of Euro-American radical thought.” These movements had a broad impact, and not only on those who went on to volunteer in Spain.

By focusing on African Americans who *travelled* to Spain, studies of African Americans in the Spanish Civil War have tended to overlook the participation of institutions that would not be considered of the political left. The scholarship has also missed the experience of the “folks at home.” The groundbreaking collection of writing on African Americans and the Spanish Civil War, *It Ain’t Ethiopia But It’ll Do*, suggests that Spain had broad, popular resonance for African Americans after the widely felt defeat of Ethiopia to fascist Italy in the Italo Ethiopian War, but still focuses on those who travelled to Spain to serve or report. Robin Kelley notes in the introduction a few of the phenomena apparent in Edwards’ scrapbook, such as the organizing of Harlem churches, and medics’ efforts to fundraise to send an ambulance to Spain. Kelley provides some sense of the wide range of participation happening among African Americans at home, at least in New York. He notes:

> Several black medical personnel from the United Aid for Ethiopia (UAE) offered medical supplies and raised money in the community; Harlem churches and professional organizations sponsored rallies on behalf of the Spanish Republic; black relief workers

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64 Ibid., 19.
and doctors raised enough money to purchase a fully equipped ambulance for use in Spain; and some of Harlem’s greatest musicians, including Cab Calloway, Fats Waller, Count Basie, W.C. Handy, Jimmy Lunceford, Noble Sissie, and Eubie Blake, gave benefit concerts.  

But it becomes clear as we look at Thyra Edwards’ scrapbook that this captures only a fraction of the wide regional and organizational range of black organizing for Spain. The diversity becomes apparent as we look at Edwards’ scrapbook. The participants in these fundraising drives come from the Northeast, South, Midwest; they belong to the NAACP, Black Elks, an orphanage, an array of churches and hospitals; and they include musicians, writers, and artists, such as Richmond Barthe, Aaron Douglas, W.C. Handy, Fats Waller, Cab Calloway, Lionel Hampton, Teddy Wilson, Rex Ingram, Minto Cato and her quartet, William Lawrence Negro Art Singers, Andrew Dorsey’s Negro Choir of 100 voices, and Maxine Sullivan.

Edwards’ scrapbook provides a detailed account of African American organizing around the Spanish Civil War, as well as the apparatuses of newspaper reporting, fliers, mailings, raffles, and fundraising events that contributed to the efforts. Edwards’ scrapbook provides a sense of the many local black newspapers throughout the country. Her record also illustrates the mass interest in supporting Spain—through institutions and amongst individuals not often included in our histories of Spanish Civil War organizing. The efforts “at home” are less well documented than the accounts of those who went to Spain. This feminist perspective—the perspective of the imagined recipients of Langston Hughes’s epistolary poems addressed to the “folks at home”—is a crucial addendum to black history of the war in Spain. The internationalism was not only in the trenches at Villa Paz, the bars of Barcelona, the streets of Madrid—but in churches, YMCAs, and NAACP chapters in the South, Midwest, and Northeast of the U.S. (and perhaps beyond—

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65 Ibid.
we need further investigation of black newspapers and other materials that would represent the West Coast, South West, etc.).

The presence of the NAACP in the scrapbook, photos, and ephemera in Edwards’ papers is particularly noteworthy. This seems to not have been remarked upon in previous work on African Americans in the Spanish Civil War, or on the NAACP. The National Field Secretary William Pickens travelled to Spain. Max Yergan and others participated in fundraising efforts and lent their names to sponsoring committees. This is contrary to the sense given, for instance, in Kathryn V. Lindberg’s article comparing autobiographies of W.E.B. Du Bois and the black ambulance driver James Yates.66 Lindberg focuses on Du Bois’s “pregnant silence on the Spanish Civil War” within the article—and associates this silence with his choice to “[continue to] publicly endorse his NAACP program.”67 However, though Du Bois’s avoidance of Spain may have been to maintain this appearance, the NAACP was not silent about Spain. Edwards’ scrapbook complicates a view that puts the NAACP and Spanish Civil War organizing at odds. While Du Bois may not have visited or organized for Spain, William Pickens did, and many NAACP organizers and members participated in the movement to send supplies to Spain.

The fliers and other publicity materials that are preserved in Edwards’ collection complement the journalistic reports of events included in the scrapbook. Edwards circulated fliers and other publicity materials that highlighted black nationalist and pro-Ethiopia, anti-fascist investment in Spain. “When You Help the Women and Children in Spain You Help Defeat Mussolini and Avenge Ethiopia!” one flier declared, and listed Paul Robeson, Philip Randolph, Max Yergan, William Pickens, Katherine Johnson, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and Irene McCoy Gaines among the sponsors. The flier concluded, “When you

67 Ibid., 417.
contribute you may be saving the life of an American Negro boy in Spain.” Another booklet, “The Negro People Defend Democracy by Aid to Spain’s People,” included a message from Angelo Herndon, the prominent communist whose brother Milton was killed in Spain, on “Why Negroes Aid Loyalist Spain.” Herndon links black volunteers in Spain to an African American revolutionary tradition: “Like Crispus Attucks, Peter Salem and countless other Negro heroes of the American Revolutionary War and the War between the states, the hundreds of Negroes who have gone to Spain, have by their heroism and daring courage, won new friends and allies to the cause of Negro liberation in every land where slavery and racial oppression reign. They have written new and glorious chapter in the struggles of the Negro people for liberation.”

The ambulance campaign—to raise money to send an ambulance and supplies to Spain—was launched after Louise Thompson and Thyra Edwards returned from Spain in the Fall of 1937. Salaria Kee returned from Spain in the spring of 1938. Kee and Edwards went on tour to multiple cities throughout the Northeast, South, and Midwest. The ambulance was inscribed, “From the Negro People of America to the People of Republican Spain.” Edwards saved a few of the tour’s internal documents. The itinerary for their tour details the dates, city, and local medical bureau contact for each stop.68 This highlights one of their major strategies, getting in touch with local nurses and doctors. They started in New York City on August 15th, stopping in Hampton, VA; Richmond, VA; and Norfolk, VA; Washington D.C.; Baltimore; Pittsburgh; Toledo; Detroit; Michigan City and South Bend; Chicago; Des Moines (annotated with a question mark on the itinerary); Kansas City; St. Louis; Terre Haute (crossed out with South Bend written above in pencil); Indianapolis; Louisville; Frankfort & Lexington; Cincinnati, Dayton, Columbus, and Cleveland, Ohio; Pittsburgh; Chester; Philadelphia; and then returned to New York City on September 24th and 25th. They had a fairly sophisticated organizing strategy.

68 Edwards, “Correspondence and other papers, 1937-1939.”
They sent instructions on to their local contacts on how to prepare for their visit. The first point on a two-page “Suggested Plan of Work for Reception of the Ambulance en tournage with Salaria Kee and Thyra Edwards” highlights the importance of black newspapers in their publicity strategy. It informed the local organizers, “Releases are being sent to all Negro papers. Add to these items of your local committee’s preparation for the arrival of the ambulance. Photos and news stories will be sent continuously as the tour progresses.”

The “suggested plan of work for reception of the ambulance en tournage with Salaria Kee and Thyra Edwards” also suggests advertising on the radio, church announcements, and placards at “movie theaters in Negro areas” that were to be “illustrated with a photograph of the ambulance party,” as well as distributing placards and handbills. Each location was to “secure a list of 100 sponsors at $1.00 each,” and encouraged to “set a quota for your community.” The document suggests contacting interested groups in the community that could be involved with planning and fundraising, such as “trade unions, church, medical and hospital groups, fraternities, sororities, the I.W.O., Y.W.C.A., N.A.A.C.P., Fed. Of Col. Women’s Clubs, lodges, etc.” Again, this wide range of organizations indicates the inclusive strategy of Edwards and Kee’s tour. (The list of organizations here also echoes the list of organizations in the announcement of the ambulance fund; combined with the feminist slant of that latter document, I suspect that Edwards was the author of both.) Elsewhere in the plan, they recommended involving “nurses and medical men,” as well as Y.W.C.A.s and Y.M.C.A.s—again, not typically the kind of organization associated with Spanish Civil War mobilization in contemporary scholarship. The document recommends donation drives at churches, and suggests: “Ask theaters in the Negro sections to put on a special performance when admission will be a can of milk or a bar of soap.” Those donations “should be collected as part of the
publicity drive preceding the arrival of the ambulance party,” and should be put on display when they arrived. Upon the ambulance’s arrival, there was to be a cavalcade “and perhaps a parade.” The visual elements of these directives are suggestive of a broad, sophisticated understanding of political event planning. The instructions indicated to their hosts that they expected “a ton or two” in donations from each community. They also recommended a mass meeting, or “street corner meetings on prominent business corners in the Negro district” or “a series of small outdoor neighborhood meetings as excellent substitutes or supplements” to a mass meeting.

Edwards also saved a daily itinerary for their day in Cleveland on Sunday, September 17, 1938. They were to visit four churches over the course of the day, and made a variety of presentations. Again, this packed day of speaking engagements illustrates the participation of black churches in the Spanish cause. Each entry includes an address, the name of a contact (usually a reverend) and a note about the logistics of their appeal. The first church didn’t allow for an appeal for funds within the church: “The Relief Ship and the Negro Ambulance can be told about and an address where they can take things.” At the next church, they had ten minutes to speak at the end of service. The third church of the day, a Seventh Day Adventist church, allowed for 30 minutes of speaking from “Miss Edwards,” an intermission, and then the “introduction of Miss Kee,” followed by discussion and question period. The final stop of the day saw them at a “Young peoples meeting,” where they were to have 30 minutes of “informal talk.”

On the “Annual Rally Day” at Trinity Baptist Church, Edwards and Kee were guests at the B.Y.P. U. (Baptist Young People’s Union), and the topic of their remarks was advertised as “Refugees of modern warfare—A study of Spain.” The program invited “all who are interested in learning about modern warfare and what it does to people, soldiers, and civilians alike.”

69 Ibid.
Another program, at Simpson M.E. Church in Indiana, lists a talk by Kee, “Head Nurse, Harlem Hospital, New York,” and Edwards, “World Traveler and Social Worker.” Another flier for one of Salaria Kee’s appearances highlights her public role as spokesperson: “Salaria Kee…who will tell her story of Negroes in Spain.”

Edwards and Kee also had high profile meetings with international figures, and other prominent African Americans in the U.S. These events were covered in the press, and Edwards has a number of the photographs that illustrated these stories (indicating, in a different way, her involvement in circulating accounts of their activities). The Consul of Spain hosted a reception for Salaria Kee in Chicago, upon her return from Spain, and Edwards has a photograph from the event. Another photo’s caption identifies “Salaria Kee as the Guest of the Spanish Consul, Señor Perez at a luncheon for the French deputy at Morrison Hotel, Chicago, Ill.” The “Prince Ntabongo of Uganda, talking of Ethiopian refugees in kraals in French and English African Colonies” appears in another. Events were also held when Arnold Donawa, oral surgeon and former dean of Howard School of Dentistry, returned from Spain. At one, Louise Thompson spoke. At Howard, a Sponsoring Committee that included Alain Lock and Ralph Bunche hosted a dinner.

Art and artists also played a big role in the organizing efforts. On one occasion, Salaria Kee inspired a Chicago woman to donate works of art to the cause. The scrapbook includes a July 15, 1938 clipping from a Chicago Defender, which announced in its headline “Philanthropist donates art treasures for Spain.” The article opens by quoting the donor: “‘You have a Florence Nightingale there, and I want to help you immortalize her,’ was the comment of Mrs. Henry I. Wurzburg, well known Chicago philanthropist, when she met Salaria Kee.” Wurzburg donated “A Spanish Village” by A. Barone and “The Peasants” by
Anton Bougereau. Edwards saved a flier that indicates that “A Barone Oil Painting” was put on exhibit, with free admission, by the Northern District Association of Colored Women in Chicago, on behalf of the Salaria Kee Ambulance Fund.

The visual strategies of this fundraising campaign relied heavily on images of the ambulance itself. The ambulance and the ship it sailed on were highly photogenic subjects. Edwards preserved many photos of prominent people posing with the ambulance. The ambulance appeared in a peace parade in New York, and prominent African Americans like Max Yergan, W.C. Handy, Channing Tobias, Kee, Edwards, Bertram Totten (who joined Kee and Edwards on at least part of the tour), and so on. Aaron Douglas and a group of friends posed with the ambulance. The ambulance is hoisted up to the ship in several photos. There is also a photo of an African American crew member, wearing a shirt with “S. S. Erica Reed American Relief Ship for Spain” on the front,” sent from Spain. The back is stamped “Copyright by Foto Walter” with an address in Barcelona. A caption (perhaps in Edwards’ hand?) is added in pencil: “A sailor and the ambulance the Negro people contributed to the American Relief Ship.” Another photo is captioned “hospital ship near Valencia; Paul Robeson talks with two American Negro soldiers of International Brigade,” and provided detailed cropping instructions on the back.

The clippings arranged in the scrapbook and the folders of photographs and fliers in Edward’s collection tell complementary stories. The handwritten notes on the back of photographs indicate another kind of hands-on crafting of narrative, archive, and history. She sent out the photographs and press releases to be printed in the newspaper coverage of these events, and then she clipped and archived the articles. She played an active role in the recording of black Spanish Civil War activism on both sides of the printing process.
Celebrities lent their names and talents to the cause, and Edwards seems to have been involved in organizing these events as well. In her folder of photographs, there are publicity photos of the trumpeter Roy Eldridge, Juanito Halls’ Choir, John Robinson, “Fats” Waller, and Maxine Sullivan. There are a couple of photos of Rex Ingram “performing for Hollywood Actor’s Ambulance for Spain.” There’s a photo of W.C. Handy with a pen in hand, with a caption provided on the back: “W.C. Handy sends out invitations to Negro Stars asking that they join his birthday celebration for the benefit of Spanish Children’s Milk Fund.” A flier for the birthday concert at Carnegie Hall called it “Once in a lifetime!” and advertised the participation of Fats Waller, W.C. Handy, Cab Calloway, Lionel Hampton, Teddy Wilson, Rex Ingram, Minto Cato and her quartet, William Lawrence Negro Art Singers, Andrew Dorsey’s Negro Choir of 100 voices, and Maxine Sullivan, under the auspice of “Harlem Comm. And Musicians Comm. To Aid Spanish Democracy” to benefit the Spanish Children’s Milk Fund. The organizers encouraged supporters to sell tickets. One paper slip, apparently distributed to the attendees of a fundraising lunch, includes blank spaces for the volunteer to fill in with their pledges: “I will take to sell __ Tickets @ $2.20; __ Tickets at $1.65; __ @ $1.10.” Though there were many musicians and performers taking part in efforts for Spain, it still seemed to be something of a surprise for mainstream media. The Daily News reported, in November 1938, “W.C. Handy’s 65th birthday party at Carnegie Hall, Nov. 21st, which will have a program by a brilliant collection of colored artists, is being sponsored by (of all things) the Harlem Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy.”

In one photo, the camera caught Edwards in the middle of a word, as she holds a stack of fliers, extending one towards a white man, mid blink. The flier advertises an upcoming event with Paul Robeson in New York. The ticket for the event, also among Edwards’ ephemera,
advertised the participation of Louis Aragon, Constancia de la Mora “and other prominent speakers,” and “Paul Robeson in a program of songs of the people.” Another flier for the same event advertises that Alain Locke would speak too. I am moving quickly through a lot of materials and images, in order to mark the breadth of the activity—but I hope many of these examples will be taken up more closely in the future.

The sculptor Richmond Barthé created a piece that was auctioned off to raise money for Spain. A photograph of a “country store” run by the “Negro People’s Committee to Aid Spain,” shows jam jars on the counter beside Richmond Barthé’s sculpture “Little Spanish Mother.” A sign invites visitors to “Take a Chance” on the sculpture, “Value $30, now being raffled.” A sign hanging from the top of the store lists prices for various grocery items (Malted Milk .20, Spices and seasoning .05, Relishes .05, Worcestershire .15, Canned goods .05 & .10). Rice, shoelaces, and wrapping ribbons were also on offer. Fliers for Robeson’s concert—the same flier Edwards was passing out in the picture mentioned above—are attached to the front of the counter.

Richmond Barthé’s “Little Spanish Mother,” was sometimes known as “Little Spanish Woman.” The figure of the Spanish Republican mother, of course, is a heavily symbolic one. Mothers mourning their children featured prominently as a symbol of Spanish Republican victimization by the fascists. The imagery of Spanish women, dead beside their children, or holding a child’s hand and looking up at the sky for passing planes, of climbing out of a bomb shelter, became a typical representation of life during the war. The Spanish woman, like the frantic figure in Picasso’s Guernica, is metonym for aerial bombing and its indiscriminate violence against innocent civilians and civilian life. Richmond Barthé’s sculpture is not so saturated with this symbolism as the images reproduced in propaganda posters and the press, but the figure still invokes women’s experience, and Spanish femininity, as a thing to be protected.
The sculpture is of a slight, elegant figure, whose title indicates her maternity. He donated a sculpture of two refugee children later, in 1939.\(^7\) Barthé, like Edwards, has an eye to the experiences of women and children in war.

Just as Edwards and Kee encouraged organizers in other cities to put on shows in local theaters to get contributions, committees in New York organized performances, too. One announcement, with a homemade, handwritten aesthetic, a page folded in quarters, invited recipients to a performance to benefit Spain. “Do you want to get rid of those summer doldrums???” the front of the card enticed. It opens to read, “Here’s the tonic that will set you up for the rest of the winter! And you’ll help send an ambulance to Spain— First time in Harlem! Entire score of The Cradle Will Rock (on records) with running commentary by Ben Irwin of the New Theatre League. Meet the members of the cast of “HAITI” Songs by McKinley Reeves (Formerly with “Green Pastures”), Spanish Novelties, Dancing, Refreshments.” This event, though it may have been amateur in its publicity, boasted an impressive range (and caliber) of performers. Haiti and Green Pastures were successful Broadway shows that featured black casts. Mark Blitzstein’s musical about a strike, Cradle Will Rock, was a more politically-pointed popular front production put on by the small leftwing New Theatre League. Ben Irwin, who provided commentary at this event, was involved with the New Theatre League and Popular Front theatre projects. He authored with Dorothy Rosenblum a newspaper play put on by the New Theatre League, CIO on the March. This convergence of commercial and political theatre indicates the willingness of a multitude of African Americans to engage in support for the Spanish Republicans.

In the spring of 1939, the Nationalists declared victory. From that point, fundraising efforts were aimed at helping the thousands of refugees leaving Franco’s Spain. Admission to

\(^7\) “My Day by Eleanor Roosevelt, July 28, 1939.”
Aaron Douglas’ Exhibition of Haitian Paintings in April 1939 in New York went to the Negro Peoples Committee of the Medical Bureau and North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy, to aid Spanish refugees. Countee Cullen signed the invitation to the exhibit. Aaron Douglas also appears in a report on “Activities in Chapters” in a Negro Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy publication. The report included a photograph that gives a sense of the range of figures engaged in with Spain:

- Roy Wilkins, editor of the ‘Crisis,’ and Walter White, secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, at a cocktail party given in honor of Aaron Douglass, noted artist, on behalf of Spain. Hosts for the occasion were Muriel Draper, Rockwell Kent, Richmond Barthé and Dr. Godfrey Nurse.

Edwards’ has an original of the photograph. On the back someone (I imagine Edwards) annotated the image, identifying, “L to R 1. Richmond Barthé, 2. Roy Wilkins, 3. Miss Muriel Draper, 4. Aaron Douglas, 5. Walter White,” plus measurements for cropping. I assume, again, that the existence of this photograph in her papers indicates that Edwards provided the photo for publication, if not the entire report.

Richmond Barthé created another sculpture to aid Spanish refugees in 1939. A letter among Edwards’ ephemera called to supporters to buy “numbers” for the drawing for Richmond Barthé’s “appealing twenty-four inch figure—two child refugee figures” made for the committee, and to be raffled at the “Second Annual Village Fair.” The letter prompted supporters to take part, and soon: “Will you write us at once saying how many numbers we may send you?” The June 1939 appeal to benefit “the Spanish Refugee Relief Campaign,” on the fair’s letterhead—came from the Auspices of the “Women’s Division of the Medical Bureau and North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy.” Dorothy Parker is listed as “overseer” and

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71 Edwards, “Correspondence and other papers, 1937-1947.”
among the other committee members listed on the letterhead are Fiorello LaGuardia, Mrs. Franklin Delanor Roosevelt, Sherwood Anderson, Muriel Draper, Fannie Hurst, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Orson Welles, Gypsy Rose Lee, and Cole Porter. These public figures, including the current mayor of New York, Mayor LaGuardia, and Eleanor Roosevelt, the wife of the sitting president of the United States, and an array of other writers and performers, contributed to fundraising to aid Spain. This fundraising was for the refugees, rather than the war effort, but still, considering the omission of the Spanish Civil War from U.S. history today, the participation of LaGuardia and Roosevelt in these activities seems extraordinary.

Eleanor Roosevelt wrote about Barthé’s sculpture in her “My Day” column in the N.Y. World Telegram, July 2nd, 1939. Edwards included the clipping in her scrapbook, and drew a frame around the clipping in thick ink. Roosevelt related what she calls “a very charming story” about Richmond Barthé. She reports, “The stories of the Spanish refugees made such an impression on Richmond Barthé, the sculptor, that he has given his sculptured figures of two Spanish refugee children as a contribution to the Negro People’s Committee for Spanish Refugee Relief. His only stipulation is that the proceeds must go to resettle a Spanish family in Mexico.” Richmond Barthé’s sculpture “Spanish Woman and Child” also featured in a photo essay in Newsweek titled “A Statue is Born.” Edwards kept that clipping too; it survives in her folder of materials on Spain.

Edwards’ scrapbook provides detailed evidence of African American organizing around the Spanish Civil War. She crafts an account that underlines the feminist concerns about fascism and feminist contributions as organizers. Her papers also provide a material history that emphasizes the apparatuses of newspaper reporting, fliers, mailings, and events in raising interest and circulating information. The labor involved in these efforts, from the abbreviated caption

72 “My Day by Eleanor Roosevelt, July 28, 1939.”
written in pencil on the back of a photograph sent to a newspaper, to the handing out of fliers leading up to an event, to the typing of a daily itinerary, at least some of the work that made these events happen comes to the surface in these objects. In this case, the scrapbook and Edwards’ pamphlets seek to reveal the unacknowledged work of black women organizers

* * *

“WE MUST CONSULT THE NEWSPAPERS”

The scrapbook is generally thought of as a domestic, personal, autobiographical form. Today, craft stores offer several aisles of scrapbook supplies—archival paper of varying colors, patterns, and stock, glue, paper frames, scissors that cut scalloped edges, and words and images that can be affixed next to family photos and mementos. The marketing of these products assumes a particular kind of domesticity, a heteronormative, nuclear family. In the 1930s, scrapbooks often served a similar purpose—autobiographical, family keepsakes, or, sometimes, a record of individual aesthetic preferences. Recent studies like Scrapbooks in American Life and Scrapbook: An American History highlight this kind of practice—college students, mothers, and politicians recording their lives. Individuals chronicle the passing of time with souvenirs, photographs, and awards to put an identity on display. But there is another tradition of scrapbooks that isn’t represented in today’s craft store displays. People also use scrapbooks to document outsider histories, to gather materials and evidence of a story that is absent or misrepresented in the mainstream. In these homemade texts, their creators call out the injustice and bias in mainstream media sources, taking a scissors to the newspaper, and launching critique
through juxtaposition and montage, and collecting.\textsuperscript{73}

Modernists sometimes used scrapbooks in this more transgressive way. The German artist Hannah Höch’s scrapbook, for instance, gathered images from mainstream media, indexing imagery and themes she would take on and satirize in her photomontages.\textsuperscript{74} These included representations of race and empire, gender, politicians, embodiment, and so on. The title of one of her major works, \textit{Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser durch die letzte Weimarer Bierbauchkulturepoche Deutschlands} (Cut with the Kitchen Knife through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany), underlines her provocative repurposing of the domestic realm and mainstream media images.

Similarly, Virginia Woolf made reading notebooks as she was writing what was initially conceived of as a single work (visible in the fiction-essay \textit{The Pargiters}), which became \textit{Three Guineas} and \textit{The Years}. Woolf, like Höch, strategically culled mainstream news for images and reporting with which she could ridicule the ruling men of her day. Her reading notebooks demonstrate her critical eye. \textit{Three Guineas}, the book length essay she eventually publishes, incorporates photographs of ruling men throughout the pages of her critique. \textit{Three Guineas} also comments on the newspaper as a source, as a place where she finds both evidence of the militarism and fascism in patriarchy, as well as the resistance of women. “We must consult the newspapers,” the narrator declares, in order to find traces of the lives of women not found in biographies and history texts.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{73} This could of course also be true for outsider perspectives on the right, who feel their views are not being represented in the press. There isn’t anything inherently egalitarian or liberatory about the scrapbook form. Jordana Mendelson warns against associating montage with left politics in \textit{Documenting Spain}.

\textsuperscript{74} Luyken, \textit{Hannah Höch}; Lavin and Höch, \textit{Cut with the Kitchen Knife}, 72.

\textsuperscript{75} Woolf, Marcus, and Hussey, \textit{Three Guineas}, 136.
The Harlem bibliophile Alexander Gumby similarly consulted newspapers for evidence of both discrimination against and the lives of African Americans in the 1920s and 30s. His numerous scrapbooks (well over a hundred end up in Columbia’s rare books library) earned him the nickname “Mr. Scrapbook.” He hosted a book salon in the 1920s, supported by a friend who worked on Wall Street. Gumby kept his scrapbooks in the book salon. Fellow gay Harlem Renaissance figure Bruce Nugent described Gumby thus:

He had a hobby, as all gentleman do—a hobby apart from the collecting of artists. He collected rare books. He had a flair for this activity that amounted practically to genius. His instincts were nearly infallible. He also collected rare newspaper clippings, which he kept in many file boxes. In his spare moments he mounted them carefully in scrapbooks of mammoth size and meticulous organization.

It was this secondary hobby which was to become a most important and interesting contribution on his part.\textsuperscript{76}

Gumby’s creation of an alternative history text was not without its hazards, however. Gumby once had a much more expansive collection of books and scrapbooks than that which reached Columbia University. When the stock market crashed, his supportive friend lost his wealth and the book salon closed. Then, Gumby fell ill. His precarious financial position impacted his collections.\textsuperscript{77} He was publicly known enough that fundraisers for his health costs were covered in black newspapers. He put his books into storage at a friend’s place; however, their custodian was negligent—he sold off most of the collection of rare books and left other materials in a basement where they were water damaged. What Gumby salvaged was what became the basis of his extensive scrapbooks on African American culture, organized into large, handsome volumes,

\textsuperscript{76} Nugent, \textit{Gay Rebel of the Harlem Renaissance}, 224.
\textsuperscript{77} Versions of this story appear in Scandura, \textit{Down in the Dumps}; Garvey, \textit{Writing with Scissors}; Rhodes-Pitts, \textit{Harlem Is Nowhere}.
with handmade frames and envelopes, and organized thematically into volumes on individuals, like Joe Louis, or topics, like the Negro as a Soldier or his Book Studio. In an article he wrote for the Columbia Library Record after his donation, he explained his project as a corrective to mainstream histories. He wrote, “There are so many surprising and startling historical events pertaining to the American Negro that are not recorded in the Standard Histories, dictionaries, and school textbooks, or if so, they are shaded so that they sound like a Ripley’s ‘Believe it or not’.” Gumby’s scrapbooks remind us that extraordinary scrapbooks should not be viewed simply as a preparation for another work, as we might be tempted to read Hannah Höch’s scrapbook, or Virginia Woolf’s reading notebooks. Rather, scrapbooks are projects in their own right—archives, documentaries, experiments that take on mainstream media and perform a historical intervention. A documentary form, it assembles fragments of text and image to make a statement.

The interwar scrapbook can be linked with collage, dada, surrealism, and Picasso’s newspaper vases. In the years between the World Wars, with the acceleration of fascism and racist backlash aimed at returning soldiers in the U.S. and Europe, artists and activists undertook the creation of counter narratives. Jane Marcus has said of Virginia Woolf and Walter Benjamin that as they collected their clippings and fragments, “—they were like robbers making attacks on history.” This sense of a collection as “ammunition” can also be traced to Frederick Douglass, who extolled his readers in one of his articles to “clip this article and put it in your scrapbook” to save it for the right moment.

In Collecting as Modernist Practice, Jeremy Braddock proposes the “two most prominent

78 Gumby, “Gumby’s Scrapbook Collection of Negroiana.”
79 Gumby, “The Adventures of my Scrapbooks.”
80 Marcus, Art & Anger, 75.
81 Garvey, Writing with Scissors, 131.
forms of modernist collecting were the privately assembled, but publicly exhibited, art collection and the interventionist literary anthology.\footnote{Braddock, Collecting as Modernist Practice, 3.} I propose that the scrapbook is an important ancillary modernist form to these collecting practices—one that totters on the line between public and personal, and as such speaks to a modernism among those not so institutionally sanctioned. There are differences, of course. Braddock notes the framing apparatus of anthologies and art exhibits something that the scrapbook normally lacks. The scrapbook uses a minimal textual apparatus, no lengthy introduction. As a single curated production, unreproducible, scrapbooks share elements of the private art collection; as a textual object that assembles diverse materials, it also has parallels to the modernist anthology.

Cunard is a particularly interesting figure in such a consideration. She was an enthusiastic, devoted anthologist. Her enormous anthology \textit{Negro} gathered hundreds of pages of photographs, prose, poetry, ethnography, et cetera. In addition to \textit{Negro}, she was envisioning another anthology of “revolutionary Negro poets” (which never came to fruition) when the Spanish Civil War began.\footnote{Hughes, Cunard, and Patterson, Poetry, Politics, and Friendship in the Spanish Civil War, 13.} A similar documentary and experimental sensibility undergirds her Spanish Civil War scrapbooks. She published a series of pamphlets publishing poems in groups and pairs, the collaboration with Pablo Neruda, \textit{Poètes du Monde defendent les Peuples Espagnol} (Poets of the World Defend the Spanish People). During World War II, she put together an anthology about France under occupation, \textit{Poems for France} (1944). She also published a collection of her own poems on Spain, \textit{Nous les Gens d’Espagne}. The heterolingual projects that she did around Spain—the series with Neruda, her retrospective poems in French, her later “Sonnet in Five Languages”—gives us a framework.
for making sense of the scrapbook, also in multiple languages, with the paratext in French.\(^{84}\) The international scope and multiple languages employed mark Cunard’s Spanish Civil War work as particularly engaged.

Cunard’s scrapbook begins with a note that draws attention to how vulnerable the materials assembled were to destruction and loss. “How did the scrapbook even make it to the archive?” a student asked in a class I recently taught on the subject. Edwards’ scrapbook also points to the semi-precarious status of scrapbooks in the institutional archive. They are comprised of heterogeneous materials often excised from their original context. They are personal, quirky, and difficult to index and catalog, so scrapbooks often remain in hidden collections.\(^{85}\) Archivists have also sometimes intervened to rescue the contents of the scrapbook from decay or oblivion by moving the perhaps more valued clipping or photograph or letter or artifact from an idiosyncratic (i.e. not rational, hierarchized) organizational premise, to a more rational one, and from adhesives or paper that may not be up to the industry standard. Archivists did not always value the scrapbook in its intact form, prioritizing instead the pieces of ephemera it contained as individual objects.\(^{86}\) Today, the archival protocol holds that scrapbooks should generally be preserved as a totality. But there is still a practical question when an adhesive loses its hold. Should the clipping or object be reattached, or kept separate, protected in a plastic sleeve? Removing materials from the pages of the scrapbook, one loses the beauty, irony, and commentary that can come out of juxtaposition. As in a collage, where pieces exert meaning upon one another and create a new set of meanings, a scrapbook can use juxtaposition to make a statement. This information is lost if a photograph or clipping is removed from the pages without

\(^{84}\) The term “heterolingual” I pick up from Kutzinksi, *The Worlds of Langston Hughes*.

\(^{85}\) Altermatt and Hilton, “Hidden Collections within Hidden Collections: Providing Access to Printed Ephemera.”

\(^{86}\) Garvey, *Writing with Scissors*, 211.
Today, we exercise scrapbook-like practices in online environments en masse. Each facebook post, tweet, pinterest board, tumblr, blog, and so on, curates a set of images, articles, commentary, memorabilia, autobiography, correspondence. I imagine the creators of these interwar projects as close relatives of the people behind the social media aided activism (sometimes called twitter revolutions) seen in the Arab Spring, Occupy, or Ferguson. They all make use of publishing technologies and forms with which to circulate their political vision, witness, vantage point, internationally.
POSTSCRIPT

How To Do Things With Archives

The seed of this dissertation began in a Kinkos on the Upper West Side, as I made (probably illicit) copies of my professor’s copies from the archives. It was my first semester of graduate school, and I had delved into my research on Langston Hughes and the Spanish Civil War for Jane Marcus’s British Writers and the Spanish Civil War course. (Hughes, of course, was not British, but I sometimes have a perverse approach to writing papers and designing projects, and Jane allowed this tendency.) My research brought me to the Schomburg, where I read the Baltimore Afro-American on microfilm, the periodicals room of the New York Public Library on 42nd Street to scroll through reels of the Daily Worker, and to its reading room to browse paper copies of Volunteer for Liberty. I found poems published in periodicals and scoured Hughes’s Collected Poems for any related to Spain. I drew on the pamphlets in the series of Les Poètes Du Monde Défendent Le PeupleEspagnol, which included one that paired Hughes’s “Song of Spain” with a poem by Lorca. I read secondary scholarship on Hughes and the Spanish Civil War, including work by Michael Thurston, Anthony Dawahare, and Cary Nelson. I had careful and thorough notes on loose-leaf paper (perhaps the most organized of my graduate school career). I had, I thought, a pretty thorough grasp of Hughes’s work from Spain.

As I was making these copies at the Kinkos on the Upper West Side, however, I came across a poem I hadn’t seen before. I had to double check, because it featured some familiar elements. It was an epistolary poem, signed from Johnny and addressed to Alabama. The content of the letter, however, was new. “Dear Sis,” the letter began. This poem—my first archival
discovery—was my entry into graduate school, and the beginning of this project.

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My methodology, then, for research in (women’s) archives:

1. Talk with feminist scholars.

   In my case, this happened in my classes with Jane, and with others of her students, including Rowena Kennedy-Epstein, who had, this same semester, gone to the Library of Congress and found an unpublished Spanish Civil War novel by Muriel Rukeyser in a box marked “Miscellaneous.” Rowena has gone on to bring Rukeyser’s novel, *Savage Coast*, into publication with the Feminist Press. Jane insisted on the importance of going to the archive. She spoke with the knowledge of the women who scholars excised from history in the interest of portraying heroic men. And she spoke with the experience of fighting for the return of women’s texts and histories to libraries, classrooms, bookstores, and public discourse.¹ She also knew these internationalist connections among writers that I wanted pursue, and was generous in sharing what she’d found in her own archival research. Evelyn Scaramella also modeled generosity of scholarship for me. When we discovered we’d been pursuing many of the same subjects and visiting practically all of the same archives, she was kind enough to share with me her discoveries and insights from her extensive research in Hughes’s papers at

¹ Marcus, *Hearts of Darkness*, 145. “Accustomed as I was to challenging the hegemony of literary estates and biographers of writers […] it was a shock to find that a healthy suspicion and a basic skepticism about received wisdom are as necessary in reading (and believing) the biographers, autobiographers, and literary historians of what is called The Harlem Renaissance.”
the Beinecke. She tipped me off, for example, to certain folders that wouldn’t seem to include Spanish Civil War materials, but did. She recommended Spanish publications to look at and passed on her article about Hughes’s friendship with Dorothy Peterson. This collaborative ethos and spirit of sharing enabled my own research. Though time in the archive tends to be solitary, the work does not need to be. Jane’s students exchanged information and organized panels on women and the Spanish Civil War, and I also benefited from contact with the students, writers, and scholars who work on the Lost & Found CUNY Poetics Document Initiative chapbooks. Such communities are crucial to archival work, and contain a seed that could potentially transform academic labor and production to something more collective.

2. Imagining beyond the archive.

As I wrote that first seminar paper on Hughes and the Spanish Civil War, I remember pondering a line from Jane Marcus’s *Hearts of Darkness: White Women Write Race*: “I […] thought it would be an interesting problem in gay history to open that folder on writers and the Spanish civil war in Cunard’s papers at the Humanities Research Center, to think about the relation between radicalism, race and homosexuality in the context of the Spanish Civil War.” Marcus conjures this folder for her readers so that they can join her in filling a critical void in modernist scholarship. It was an invitation to read with imagination, critically, between the lines of what is on the page. I found a related gesture in Griselda Pollock’s *Virtual Feminist Museum*. She proposes “a museum that could never be actual,” in which the young German artist Charlotte Salomon and teenaged diarist Anne Frank (who mused that she might become an art historian)

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2 Ibid., 146.
encounter one another. Nazis killed both of them in concentration camps. Pollock wonders, “What would Anna Frank have written about Charlotte Salomon’s work as they both aged,” and what world would they have created? Pollock marks “the lostness of that generation not only of Jewish modernist women, but of entire cultural moments of transformation and challenge.” Feminist scholars approach the archive with the knowledge that it is necessarily incomplete, and by no means a “neutral” zone. Those of us who want to interrogate these exclusions, and consider what other worlds are possible, enter that uncertainty with a critical stance that is open, curious, perhaps suspicious, perhaps angry—but not neutral. The ethical stakes of research come into focus.

A researcher whose inquiry goes against the logic, description, or disciplinary assumptions inscribed in an archive’s organization, must speculate, and ruminate. In “The Taste of the Archive,” Brent Edwards recalls encountering a photograph of a man emerging from *vespasienne*, a public toilet in Paris, in Claude McKay’s papers at the Beinecke Library:

Although I didn’t have any way to place it, the *vespasienne* photo in McKay’s papers remained in the back of my mind for years and, as I worked on other things, from time to time I reconsidered it. In the summer of 2010, I went to see an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art called “Henri Cartier-Bresson: The Modern Century,” which included samples from the remarkable scrapbooks Cartier-Bresson had kept in the early 1930s. On a hunch, I wrote to the Fondation Cartier-Bresson to ask whether anyone there recognized the photo,

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4 Ibid., 164.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
and the archivist there confirmed that the photograph of the man exiting
the *vespasienne* was taken by Cartier-Bresson himself.⁸

Edwards discovers the details of this photographs’ significance neither by accident nor by
force. He links this process of eventual discovery to the conditions of McKay’s
preserving the photograph in the first place. Brent Edwards writes:

[...] in McKay’s holding onto the photograph, there is something like a *queer
practice of the archive*: an approach to the material preservation of the past that
deliberately aims to retain what is elusive, what is hard to pin down, what can’t
quite be explained or filed away according to the usual categories.⁹

If McKay seeks to preserve what is elusive, Edwards describes a protocol to engage such
elusive materials. It’s a protocol that requires curiosity and serendipity. Research in
elusive materials pushes against the “usual categories” of our disciplines and
taxonomies. In Foucauldian terms, we can think of the stakes of this work as the
questions we ask or can ask.¹⁰ Can questions open up the archive? Or is it always that the
archive delimits our questions? By thinking speculatively, and skeptically, we can look
past the materials we encounter to query what is missing or what had been foreclosed by
history. McKay’s photograph by Cartier-Bresson of Charles Henri Ford emerging from a
public toilet, like the manuscript flushed down the toilet in East London, and Pankhurst’s
poems on toilet paper from Holloway Prison, are all emblems that demand that we
examine and question the forces that construct an archive.

3. Skim, Browse.

I was fortunate that the subjects I studied here generally had dedicated collections of their

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⁸ Edwards, “The Taste of the Archive.”
⁹ Ibid.
¹⁰ Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language.*
papers in institutions. (Or, another way to say this is, I came to study these figures because they had dedicated collections of papers in institutions.) As Carol Gerson notes in *Working in Women’s Archives*, often women’s work was not valued enough to be collected on its own merit. She writes, “women's papers often survive only because they have been preserved in the papers or organizations whose public significance extends value to their correspondents or members.”\textsuperscript{11} I was additionally lucky to have finding aids for all of the collections I consulted. Thanks to archivists’ labor in processing these collections, I was able to locate archives and the materials within them comfortably. Nonetheless, there is a certain amount of openness in my approach of the archive. My work benefited from a generally curious and broad approach to research (as well as financial support for archival research that granted me the time and space to be meandering). I try to skim everything that comes across my reading room desk, even if it is chronologically outside of the scope of my project, or seems irrelevant. With enough time, I request folders on a whim. If I am given boxes of folders, I flip through the contents of every folder. For one thing, dipping into the papers that made it to the repository is a way to glean a biography, or a general sense of an organization or movement, and its shifts over time. I looked at many collections that did not directly impact this project (Bricktop, Josephine Baker, Rosey Pool, The League of Coloured People, The Young Socialist Magazine, and a folder of materials related to Claudia Jones’ exile in the U.K., to name a few)—and they provided a broader context to place my study. Sometimes these searches turned up unexpected connections, like Virginia Woolf’s signature on a letter about the Scottsboro case.

4. Research intersections along the way.

\textsuperscript{11} Kadar and Buss, *Working in Women’s Archives*, 8.
As I reviewed archival materials, I tried to keep track of the individuals’ names that came up, and literary work mentioned, in order to pursue those connections. Being able to search the internet while looking at archival materials was extremely helpful. Looking at a manuscript of a Langston Hughes poem, for instance, I could search for a line to see whether it had been published. If a title of a book or periodical was mentioned, I could search Worldcat to see what library held it. I could look up information about individuals mentioned, and note if there were any publications by or about them, or if they had a collection of their own papers in an archive. These searches sometimes recursively suggested further inquiries in the original archive.

5. Bring attention to gender and digital archives.

A few years ago, Miriam Posner warned of the implications of the professional rewards granted to those who code in the field of digital humanities. Since, as she says, not all of us have had access or encouragement to learn the intricacies of code, and those who have tend to be middle and upper class white men, the field tends to be skewed. ¹² (Posner: “I love that you learned BASIC at age ten. But please realize that this has not been the case for all of us.”)¹³ If women and people of color who have not learned to code become disproportionately excluded (or have been excluded from the outset, perhaps not reaching the academy at all) from DH jobs, debates, and discipline-defining conversations, their perspectives, and by extension certain histories and texts, are, and have been, left by the wayside.

I await the Three Guineas of the digital age. Perhaps Katherine Harris has begun to articulate it. Harris raised the alarm that digitizing projects are reproducing the cano-

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¹³ Ibid.
making judgments of the past, excluding women, people of color, and cultural productions deemed middle- and low-brow.\textsuperscript{14} Harris and Roger Whitson discussed these issues on twitter, an important arena for digital humanists. Their discussion touches many points that resonate with Woolf’s cry against the exclusion of women from the public realm, material resources, and education.\textsuperscript{15} (Intriguingly, the twitter conversation echoes the formal structure of \textit{Three Guineas}, an epistolary essay that begins with an exchange with an ally of another gender.) Harris points out that digitization projects tend to draw on the collections of university libraries, some of which “have policy to not collect ephemeral stuff.”\textsuperscript{16} As Woolf wrote in 1938, we won’t find women’s experiences recorded in history books and biographies. We must look at the newspapers and other ephemeral sources. The absence of women authors from the libraries is a matter of access to money and prestigious educational institutions—a materialist concern that is announced in Woolf’s title.\textsuperscript{17} Harris argues, “we haven’t funded enuf dig projs for women authors[,] to equal those on male authors.”\textsuperscript{18} Digitalization projects have a big impact, as the work is shareable and the data sets they create can be taken to be representative.\textsuperscript{19} Scholars draw on data from these digitizations (geographical locations, word choice, etc.) to make claims about an era’s writing.\textsuperscript{20} Harris’s warning has some teeth. The “mistakes of the past” are repeated, but “hidden behind all of this glorious

\textsuperscript{14} Cecire, Harris, and Whitson, “From Archival Silence to Glorious Data (with Tweets).”
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} Woolf, Marcus, and Hussey, \textit{Three Guineas}. See Marcus’s introduction for a discussion of Woolf’s attention to figures and funds (xli-xliv).
\textsuperscript{18} Cecire, Harris, and Whitson, “From Archival Silence to Glorious Data (with Tweets).” I wavered on whether or not to preserve the idiosyncratic spelling and abbreviations, this being a formal academic work, but decided to preserve the author’s deliberate orthographic choice. I only intervene to add a comma for clarification.
\textsuperscript{19} Whitson, “DH, Archival Silence, and Linked Open Data.”
\textsuperscript{20} Cecire, Harris, and Whitson, “From Archival Silence to Glorious Data (with Tweets).”
data,” so no one seems to notice. How do we expand the canon, and change the institutional structures that allow such erasures, in the making of and the preserving of writing?

Digital humanities may, however, offer methods to take on Woolf’s directive to read “sometimes openly in the lines, sometimes covertly between them.” Lauren Klein’s work on James Heming, chef of Thomas Jefferson, recovers Heming from the obscurity of place in the *Papers of Thomas Jefferson* to visualize the centrality of Heming’s labor in Jefferson’s life. Klein identified which documents in the *Papers* mention Hemings, and using the University of Virginia’s digital edition, text-mined all of the names in those documents. Then, she developed “a basic co-appearance script” that that tracked “the relationships between the people mentioned, and the number of times each person was mentioned together.” She created a graph of these interpersonal relationships. Klein reflected, “In contrast to the sixteen documents (out of an estimated 18,000) that turn up in a search for ‘James Hemings’ in the Jefferson *Papers*, James Hemings here is positioned at the center of the diagram. This central position points to the undocumented labor—the difficult, daily labor—that Hemings was required to perform.” This project elegantly demonstrates the potential of applying digital humanities tools to archival papers in order to bring forward figures that had been relegated to the background.

The sorts of sources that I have focused on in this dissertation—newspapers, correspondence, scrapbooks, pamphlets—tend not to be widely available in books, and

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21 Ibid.
23 Klein, “When Reading Fails.”
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
thus are missing from personal and public libraries. They are, however, suited for non-linear presentations, as becomes possible in a scrapbook or a file folder, or forms developed by digital humanities: a database of texts or images, visualizations for text analysis, network mapping, or geospatial mapping. Digital technologies provide exciting possibilities for recovering and circulating archival materials that might otherwise remain silent. If we draw on ephemeral sources to map patterns of interpersonal and organizational contact, we can point out the presence of a history that would allow for forgotten texts and individuals to reemerge for close reading and recovery. I’m imagining work that could highlight black women journalists in the 1930s—geospatial representations of their locations, a collection of articles, a social networking graph that presents connections between authors and editors. A project like Stanford’s *Mapping the Republic of Letters* could be reimagined as “Mapping Black Internationalism,” populated with case studies of figures like Hughes, Cunard, Schomburg, whose correspondence would illuminate new texts, translations, collections, and publishing projects with an international range of contacts.

* * *

The informal, semi-digital reproduction I undertook, standing at a copy machine in the Kinkos on the Upper West Side at the start of my graduate school career, was the beginning of an entry into archival inquiries. Why hadn’t this poem been discovered and republished, despite Hughes’s canonical status and the recent interest in his Spanish Civil War work? I continued to gather my personal collection of archival materials. Several years later, I saw the
materials I copied that first semester in person at the Harry Ransom Center. I took photos on my
digital camera to refer to later, a new policy for the HRC. As archives become more open to
digitization, we have to pay attention to what materials are prioritized. Digital reproduction
makes access and circulation more possible, but that potential is not an answer unto itself. What
we discover, republish, and make accessible in digital repositories is still ruled by cultural
values, methodologies, and the awarding of resources. And the people who can access these
materials, is limited by access to technology, literacy, and level of education. Digital projects
aren’t a solution to these structural problems, but they present a tool that could be applied to
challenge them. Just as photomontage isn’t inherently an antifascist form, digital projects don’t
guarantee any particular set of values.

Thyra Edwards, Nancy Cunard, Louise Thompson, Langston Hughes, and Sylvia
Pankhurst circulated narratives that challenged the dominant accounts of their societies. They
each innovated literary and print forms to reach out, internationally and interracially, to create
collectives and change history. They searched for forms with which they could reshape the
terms within which they saw the world. The projects that scholars take up in the archive today
can learn from their interwar attempts.
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