In June, 1946 Nancy Cunard wrote an angry, detailed letter to Ezra Pound at St. Elizabeth’s Hospital in Washington, D.C. In it Cunard described returning to the north of France after the war, discovering her house to have been looted by Nazi soldiers or French collaborators, her African art destroyed, her massive printing press smashed, a copy of Pound’s *Cantos* propped in a shattered window.[1] Given this testimony, it should not be surprising that the Harry Ransom Center’s rich and various Cunard archive should be especially fragmentary. But what is surprising is the fact that, of the hundreds with whom Cunard corresponded while assembling the landmark *Negro* anthology (1934), it is the correspondence with Claude McKay that appears uniquely to have survived, seemingly in its entirety. Whether adventitious or the result of Cunard’s special preservation, this unusual survival has been suggestive because of McKay’s famously acrimonious last-minute withdrawal from the *Negro* anthology project. In his recent *Commonwealth of Letters*, Peter Kalliney quotes from the correspondence in order to locate the McKay-Cunard dispute among a tenacious system of protocols specific to high literary culture.[2] But the McKay-Cunard correspondence is important, I will argue, for reasons other than the literary feud that terminates it.

This importance, located in the intersection of global racial politics and international media, is signaled by the small archive that McKay deposited within his letters, a collection of press clippings that describe Cunard’s controversial travels gathering and soliciting material for the *Negro* anthology. McKay culled
these pieces from a range of French and English-language newspapers that he had received in Tangier, Morocco, where he was then living. It is not only significant that McKay made the archive of clippings and sent them to Cunard, who then kept them; the very fact that McKay could have composed such an archive is equally, if not more, important. As McKay himself indicated, the velocity, the variability, and the transnational distribution of these press accounts all reveal the broad transformations and new relationships that had come to determine the international field of media and information by the early 1930s.[3]

One of my aims in this article is to show how the clippings, and the letters that frame them, present McKay as an especially engaged and astute reader of the new situation of media—an interest that would inform his novel *Amiable with Big Teeth* a decade later. A second objective is to examine the way Cunard’s career had been formed in relation to the same changes, something McKay undoubtedly recognized. Cunard and McKay, I suggest, each viewed the transformations in the international media economy as presenting opportunities and crises for aesthetic modernism, as well as for political action. Their interest converged as they considered the issue of Cunard’s public image, which she had by 1931 worked to refashion in the service of an international antiracist politics. Their correspondence shows Cunard and McKay deliberating together on Cunard’s experiment, testing and weighing the political valences and uses of mass-mediated celebrity in matters of racial and sexual politics as well as art, at a time when the meaning of this new mediation was uncertain.

Even as framed by McKay’s enthusiastic prose, the clippings are not simple evidence of the poet’s initial, affirmative, response to Cunard. Rather, they are a much more complex kind of evidence, bearing the marks of McKay’s personal reception, reading, and redistribution, while also retaining their objective value as descriptions, accurate and false, of events produced and distributed globally as news—accounts that were themselves composed in relation to Cunard’s longer media history. McKay, for instance, points out the way the United Press news agency dispassionately reports on Cunard’s trip to Jamaica (“accompanied by a Negro secretary . . . to collect data for her book on Negroes”), while the French-Moroccan newspapers depict the anthology project as the latest in a series of scandals that include her brief, salaciously reported, residence at Harlem’s Grampion Hotel, her support for the Scottsboro defendants, and other unspecified prior incidents: “un autre <<grand scandale>>! / Miss Nancy Cunard entreprend une campagne en faveur des nègres et de leurs arts.” (fig. 1).[4] Comprehending the individual, as well as the corporate and institutional, production, reception, and remediation of Cunard’s image will be a way of understanding the global circulation of modernist literary culture, the conditions of media and information, and the interactions of mass-mediated celebrity, literary culture, and radical race politics in the years leading up to the Second World War.
UN AUTRE « GRAND SCANDALE » !

Miss Nancy Cunard entreprend une campagne en faveur des nègres et de leurs arts

Londres, 3 mai. — Une riche et hautaine société de New-York est actuellement scandalisée par la conduite sensationnelle de l’un de ses enfants terribles : la fille de Lady Cunard, de la Cunard-Line, ne vient-elle pas, en effet, de mépriser les résidences opulentes fréquentées par les blancs honorables, pour descendre à l’hôtel Grampien, en plein cœur de Hariem, cité nègre.

Miss Nancy Cunard, bien connue dans les milieux artistiques et littéraires de Paris et de Londres, aurait entrepris de réhabiliter aux yeux du monde et de ses concitoyens; cette seconde tâche n’étant pas la moins aisée, la musique, l’histoire et les écrits des peuples noirs dispersés ou massés sur notre terre.

L’importance du scandale est manifeste, si
Produced across three continents, McKay’s Cunard archive indicates the profoundly different conditions of the 1930s as compared to the 1920s, the decade upon which most studies of modernist media and celebrity have focused. This is a difference that manifests, too, in the pages of the *Negro* anthology. The most important black anthology before Cunard’s, Alain Locke’s *The New Negro* (1925), famously combined fiction, poetry, music, and fine arts with ethnographic, bibliographic, and sociological essays, and divided its contents into two sections, “The Negro Renaissance” and “The New Negro in a New World,” that were focused mainly, though not exclusively, on the United States. With its substantial sections on Africa, Europe, the West Indies and South America, the broader international scope of Cunard’s project has long been acknowledged (though it has still not been systematically studied). But the *Negro* anthology is also distinct for a fifty-page section devoted to “Negro Stars,” which paid particular attention to new technologies such as the gramophone, radio, and vitaphone (sound) film, and to the new economy of celebrity enabled by them.[5] Moreover, the hundreds of photographs distributed throughout the anthology—images that make *Negro* bibliographically distinct from other modernist collections—include dozens of head shots and publicity stills, in addition to the more commonly remarked instances of newspaper and documentary work from the political left.[6] All of these images owed their production and their availability to the same, or strongly related, conditions. Usually taken
either as a symptom of Cunard's idiosyncrasy, or as a product of her programmatic anti-exclusivity, this technological mediation of political culture together with celebrity culture can rather be seen as broadly emblematic of the era's economy of information.

To speak in a cattier vein, this McKay-Cunard correspondence is also irresistible because of the figures' controversial and contradictory reputations, the dimensions of which have if anything magnified over the last fifteen years. Critics not limited to Sieglinde Lemke, Susan Gubar, Michael North, and Petrine Archer-Straw have posited Cunard as a political opportunist or racial fetishist, claims that Jane Marcus has on the other hand vehemently attacked, arguing that we should instead see in her a mirror image of “our own” cross-cultural academic practices.[7] Other critics like Laura Winkiel and Tory Young have approached Cunard's political turn appreciatively, but at the price of avoiding the question of her celebrity (something Marcus always emphasized).[8] In the case of McKay one finds an even more heterogeneous set of positions, ranging from David Levering Lewis's early assessment that McKay was a “deeply troubled escapist . . . [who] played literary politics shamelessly,” to Kalliney's Bourdieusian description of McKay as a writer prizing the privileges of literary autonomy, to Kate Baldwin's account of McKay's internationalist Marxism, to Gary Edward Holcomb's “queer black Marxist” approach, to William J. Maxwell's authoritative account of the importance on McKay's career of government harassment and surveillance.

The problem of multiple Cunards, and even that of multiple McKays, should not require approval or disapproval in the last instance in order to be intellectually, or even politically, valuable. Deferring, if not refusing, such judgments will help to foreground the economies of mediation that even today circulate the significations associated with the image and name of Nancy Cunard.[10] Indeed, the multiplicity, as well as the cattiness, may be sure signs of the central role of media distribution. Originating but not remaining within the circuits of modernist aesthetic culture, Cunard's iconic image proliferated and modulated to the point of becoming itself discursive, an object of debate and political instrument in its own right. It was Cunard's wish to exploit this situation, by reauthorizing herself within it and embodying its contradictions, that elicited McKay's professions of admiration, as well as the enmity of many others. Whereas critical writing has typically attended to the subjective structure and meaning of Cunard's racialized desire—as in Carla Kaplan's recent Miss Anne in Harlem—I will argue that the political meaning of Cunard's attempt to reauthorize her image can best be understood less as an effect of the contingencies of her desire, and only partially as an effect of the general politicization of culture in the 1930s.[11] Cunard's importance, I suggest, is directly bound to transformations in the overall economy of media, which circulated her image circulated in concert with a political culture that was newly technologized and mediated.
Cunard’s experiments with publicity occurred among media institutions that were not neutral and that authored Cunard images of their own. McKay’s archive of international press clippings is testimony to the attraction and ambiguity of this system of political, literary, and celebrity cultures. That ambiguity is realized in a different register, as I will finally argue, by McKay’s veiled suggestion that he might himself make a flattering contribution to Cunard’s political mythography with his contribution to the Negroid anthology. By proposing to write a historiographical piece that could also signify as propaganda authenticating Cunard’s project, McKay aimed to situate literary writing squarely within the wars of information increasingly animating the media economy. This proposal in turn illuminates his later archival—or “counterarchival”—literary practice. As I hope to show, in their separate projects and in their collective correspondence, Cunard and McKay each worked to devise political and aesthetic functions from within the system of the then-new media.

Public Images

For the purposes of this article, the most instructive portrait of McKay from which to begin is the one whose career was determined by what Maxwell has ironically and unforgettably named his “state-sponsored transnationalism”—one of a series of phrases he has used to admonish affirmational theories of cosmopolitanism, from Paul Gilroy’s Black Atlantic to, implicitly, much of the new modernist studies.[12] Shortly after publishing the poetry collection Harlem Shadows in 1922, McKay traveled from Harlem to London and then to Moscow, where he attended the Fourth Congress of the Communist International. He traveled to Berlin in 1923, arrived in Paris in 1925, and then went on in 1926 to Marseilles, where he wrote Home to Harlem, the first black-authored bestseller in the United States. In December 1930, he moved to Morocco, where he stayed until 1934. It was there that in December 1931 Cunard first wrote to solicit McKay’s contribution to the Negro anthology.

Maxwell has shown that FBI surveillance was a principal cause of McKay’s itinerancy, and thus of his extended residency in Morocco. But Morocco was also attractive to McKay for its situation at the intersection of Moorish and European cultures, and Tangier in particular, as Holcomb and Brent Hayes Edwards have each pointed out, was known to gay Europeans and Americans as a “queer refuge,” a fact that Cunard hints was also a part of its appeal (Holcomb, Claude McKay, Code Name Sasha, 59).[13] Such refuge or exile, in either event, was not isolation. The fact that Cunard and McKay could carry out a vigorous international correspondence (thirty-six letters over the course of thirteen months, at times as frequent as once a week), and that McKay could follow through numerous press sources Cunard’s well-publicized travels to Harlem, Cuba, and Jamaica reveals the way changing technological conditions during these years (such as the expansion and consolidation of wire services)
distributed modernist and political culture on an increasingly global scale, enabling transnational affiliation as well as transnational surveillance. Each of those transnationalisms is discernible in McKay’s reading of the international press coverage of Cunard.

McKay’s appreciative reception of Cunard has much to do with the longer career of her public image, which by 1931 had been widely distributed through these very means, and far more broadly than had been true for literary modernists typically discussed in the context of celebrity, such as Gertrude Stein or F. Scott Fitzgerald.[14] Even prior to her political turn, which occasioned the correspondence with McKay, Cunard’s image had circulated widely both within the fields of modernist restricted production (through the limited-run anthology and poetry volume, the privately-printed and distributed pamphlet, oil paintings and sculpture), and within fields of mass production and middlebrow consumption (through photographs, popular fiction, Hollywood cinema, and the international press). While the public sphere expanded and fractured in part by the means of media information technology and the attendant domination of capital, the image of Nancy Cunard transformed from an icon authored by prestigious artists to an emblem whose meaning was subject to discursive debate and contest, through corporate as well as individual tactics of production, reception, and reauthorization.

Over the last decade, a wave of modernist media and celebrity studies has examined the relationships between high literary and mass entertainment practices and institutions, and it is quite surprising that Cunard has scarcely been mentioned within this subfield. One critical tendency, exemplified by Judith Brown’s *Glamour in Six Dimensions*, has been to pursue what could be called a phenomenological approach. Reading modernist texts together with artifacts of mass culture, Brown is concerned to account for “glamour’s aesthetic power, as well as its range of pleasures” in high art and in consumer culture.[15] Another study of this kind, Anne Anlin Cheng’s *Second Skin*, meditates on Josephine Baker’s performances and their representations, discovering an intimate relationship between these and other characteristically modernist surfaces (notably those designed by the architect Adolph Loos). In Cheng’s account the “[modernist] pure surface looks to black skin not for disavowal but for articulation,” a phenomenon embedded within a larger dynamic in which “visual technologies affect how we see racial difference, [and] racial difference itself influences how these technologies are conceived, practiced, and perceived.”[16] Though with different emphases, these studies together suggest that an aesthetics of impersonality emerged in relation to a cultural incorporation of mass media, whose objects and images are in turn endowed with what Brown calls an “enchanted trace” of the decaying Benjaminian aura (*Glamour in Six Dimensions*, 105). Focusing as they do on aesthetics, these excellent studies are perforce less concerned with the problem of the image’s distribution and reception, or with the possibility of its explicitly political orientation.
The other prominent tendency within modernist celebrity studies is, by contrast, more sociologically oriented. The horizon of this work, however, has typically been the creation and protection of high modernist literary value in the age of publicity. In one of the first and best of these studies, Aaron Jaffe discovers a homology between the prestige of high modernist authorship, secured and signaled by what he names the “textual imprimatur,” and the celebrity image.[17] Jaffe’s study focuses on the 1910s and 1920s, years where it is still possible to construe prestige and autonomy as the *sine qua non* of modernist literary culture, and where modernist authorship and mass mediated celebrity can be understood as parallel, but largely not interactive, entities. By the 1930s, however, it is harder to view high modernist publicity and massified celebrity as distinct entities, as can be appreciated in the sensational six-month publicity tour Gertrude Stein undertook promoting the *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* in 1934, the year Cunard published the *Negro* anthology. Rather, counting the modernist literary text of the 1930s as one among many forms of media, it is better to acknowledge that the 1930s inaugurate what Su Holmes and Sean Redmond have characterized, speaking of our own age, as “the porous and interconnected nature of media forms.”[18] It is in this context that we can appreciate what Jennifer Wicke has called the “unexpected networks of affiliation, exchange, and transformation set into motion by and through celebrity.”[19] And we can at the same time consider the way the overlapping circuits of aesthetic culture, entertainment, and information could for these reasons be used much more directly as routes of both political expression and political control. Such an approach will help to clarify, without enshrining, McKay’s interest in the political potential of Cunard’s iconicity.

If McKay and Cunard’s shared interest in the political utility of the mass-distributed image, against the grain of its status as commodity, appears in retrospect to be naïve, it should be remembered that the same interest was advanced as theory by their contemporary Walter Benjamin, in “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” (1936) and elsewhere. As early as 1929 Benjamin observed that the unmistakable gait of the Little Tramp transformed Charlie Chaplin into “his own walking trademark, just like the trademark you see at the end of other films.” But he in no way saw this as mitigating Chaplin’s highly estimated critical significance and power: “Chaplin appeals to the most international and the most revolutionary emotion of the masses.”[20]

More recently, Neal Gabler’s landmark study of Walter Winchell has demonstrated the way “social authority in the early thirties had been turned on its head,” and now derived from the newly dominant forms and institutions of internationally distributed media, of which Winchell, the first syndicated gossip columnist, was king.[21] In a single Winchell “On Broadway” column from April 1932 it was possible to receive information about celebrity happenings, high modernist culture, local and global politics, indiscriminately and elliptically organized, as if by an insider (fig. 2):
The 24-hour bodyguard that trails Barbara Hutton, of the Woolworth millions, has been increased by another husky, two of the armed-corps following her limousine in a bullet-proof sedan . . . Because of the favorable treatment of the present Red regime in his new vol., “The Hist. of the Russian Rev.,” Leon Trotsky’s return from exile is being plotted by Stalin . . . Aside to Z. X. Z.: Police Com. Mulrooney has that interesting letter of yours—so, little boy, better keep your nose clean . . .

The Great Garbo break-up with that director is lifting up the Beverely [sic] eye-brows . . . Romolo [sic] Nijinsky, the famous tip-tap-toer’s wife, is doing odd jobs in the French studios to forestall the sale of his prized possessions . . . Mussolini is preparing a series of 12 articles for Fall release which will tell why war can not be abolished . . . Startling stuff! . . . Will Rogers’ niece, Kathryn, and Ensign A.R. St. Angelo, Jr., are honeymooning at the Fortescue trial in Honolulu . . . Police might investigate the new matrimonial agencies whose business has been sky-rocketed by the depression . . . One of the larger clearing houses did $10,000 last wk . . . Adolf Hitler’s application for a tour of France and Belgium was vetoed by both Govts., it will be front-paged shortly . . . Edna (“Follies”) Bunting returned to Chi to model for her latest Arm-Ache . . . [22]

That the “On Broadway” column should in fact be such a general clearing house of rumor suggests the remarkable and at times fearsome social power of Winchell’s widely-distributed column, but its wild heterogeneity also betrays a more general uncertainty about the society in which the column was so authoritative. No hierarchy or relationship is implied or ventured among the abbreviated reports that range from fascist and communist state politics (Hitler, Mussolini, Trotsky, Stalin), to modernist art (Nijinsky), Hollywood (Garbo, Will Rogers), and Broadway (Edna Bunting), to gossip from the worlds of high society and organized crime. Their ambiguous collocation in Winchell’s column implies the cultural potential of mass-distributed media to become instruments exchanging or conjoining the cultural forces that had been earlier accorded discretely to distinct social fields.
Mussolini is preparing a series of 12 articles for Fall release which will tell why war can not be abolished....Startling stuff!....

Times being what they are on the Xchange, Art Anderson of Hoyden, Stone Co., has accepted the box-office mgr-ship at Madison Sq. Garden....Will Rogers' niece, Kathryn, and Ensign A. R. St. Angelo, Jr., are honeymooning at the Fortescue trial in Honolulu....Police might investigate the new matrimonial agencies whose business has been sky-rocketed by the depression....One of the larger clearing houses did $10,000 last wk....Adolf Hitler's application for a tour of France and Belgium was vetoed by both Govts., it will be front-paged shortly.

Edna ("Follies") Bunting returned to Chi to model for her latest Arm-Ache....Leaky pipes last night destroyed the entire wardrobe of Josephine Larkin, the dancer....The uh-huhing of Doris ("Vanities") Andere and Stanley Grauer, the insurance man, developed during her St. Vincent's Hosp. seclusion....Edna Johnson, Scrappy Lambert's ex, will be sealed to a Hollywood broker....The Fred Levy, Jr.-Jeanette Leff heat, which was turned off, is again hitting all six....To attract the snootier audiences of Westchester to his dotted stock company, Alex. Leftwich is trying to sign Priscilla Gurney, the dotter of the elevator king.
Walter Winchell On Broadway

Monday, April 18, 1932

MOTHER GOOSE QUACKS WISE

By Stella Fanger

Harold Kreutzberg, who directed her last concert of the season last Sunday evening at the Craig Theatre

LOVE WILL ALWAYS BE THE SAME

Stevie may go down — we may lose all our dough. The wise girls will say "I told you so."

Life is a complex funny game. But love will always be the same. There will always be lights and always be war.

Regardless of the price and cause. Authors will write of sin and shame.

But love will always be the same. There will always be the thrill of a midnight fling. That glorious feeling of love at first sight.

Love is something one can't define. So be glad. Love will always be the same.

They Came to Loot!

Frogs, cheats, grifters, touts
... a desperate rocksteering mob, they swept down on the town to pillage, rob, destroy... met a strong power, vital enough to change the lives of all.

SYLVIA SIDNEY

SYL-VIA SIDNEY

CHESTER MORGAN

ROBERT COGAN

IRENE IRVINE

BORIS KARLOFF

JOHN WILCOX

LLOYD HUGHES

they came to loot!

... and stayed to love!

and stayed to love!

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they came to loot!

... and stayed to love!

and stayed to love!

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8/3/2018

Media Studies 1932: Nancy Cunard in the Archive of Claude McKay | Modernism / Modernity Print+

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It is a similar uncertainty that marks Benjamin’s most effusively optimistic speculations about mass media, as well as the practices of Cunard and McKay. And it is especially appropriate to include Gabler’s book in this discussion because one of the places it would be possible to read sexually insinuating accounts of Cunard’s race politics—reports which, when reproduced internationally, elicited sympathetic and admiring correspondence from Claude McKay in Morocco, as well as stacks of violent hate mail and political reaction that constrained her travel—was in the syndicated column of Walter Winchell.[23]

**From Icon to Discourse**

In April 1934, the Paris correspondent for Chicago’s premier black newspaper, the *Defender*, wrote to offer Nancy Cunard his congratulations on the recently published *Negro* anthology. The reporter, Edgar Wiggins, told Cunard that he had recently met one of her “despiser[s],” who nevertheless “had to confess his admiration” for the book and admit that “much credit [was] due . . . for that wonderful piece of work.” Wiggins went on to describe how controversial Cunard remained among Paris’s black expatriates and others:

> It is nearly two years now that I have lived in Montmartre, (you are well known here) and I can say without exaggeration that in said time I have engaged in numerous altercations, as your defender, with men and women white and black, relatively to your work and interest in the Negro. Weather [sic] they were right or wrong I am not certain, but I’ve always opposed those who endeavor to criticise and denounce you. The major trouble, as they put it, is that your intentions are good, but your method “pas bon.”[24]

The “pas bon” method to which Wiggins referred was Cunard’s advocacy of radical race politics in concert with the open publicizing of her own romantic relationships with black men. Those relationships had been observed by many on the Paris scene since the late 1920s, but they became more frankly
promoted beginning with a September 1931 article that Cunard wrote for W. E. B. Du Bois’s magazine *The Crisis* and then personally distributed, along with a circular announcing the prospective *Negro* anthology, to scores of potential contributors including Claude McKay.[25]

The fact that Wiggins defers judgment on the question of Cunard’s “method” (“right or wrong I am not certain”) suggests that what elicits his adulatory tone may be the very uncertainty of the method’s ethics and efficacy. That uncertainty undoubtedly indicates the abiding force of the threat of lynching, and in particular its use as a means of policing racialized sexuality. But it also suggests the still-undecided extent to which media institutions of celebrity might be used to attack such practices and compose or advocate a progressive politics (“good intentions”).[26] For it is the tone of what can only be called Wiggins’s fan letter that is most revealing. After affirming Nancy Cunard’s celebrity, the Paris reporter for the nationally distributed *Chicago Defender* goes on to confide: “I wanted so badly to speak to you I could have screamed.” And in his first letter of December 1931, Claude McKay, too, makes a point of informing Cunard that he had once knowingly been in her presence.[27] Without evading the racial-political implications, or occasion, of these letters, the telling aura these letters evoke—one would not expect this kind of reaction about Joyce or Woolf—suggests the determining importance of a longer history of Cunard’s celebrity image prior to and including its political turn. (Indeed, the fact that McKay informs Cunard that he was posing as a model in the Paris studio of the artist Nina Hamnet at the time their paths crossed indicates his awareness both of the authority and the degradations of the figure from whom the icon is made.)

Cunard’s career has been treated in biographies by Anne Chisholm and Lois Gordon, and glossed many times elsewhere. But it is worth reviewing, briefly but systematically, in order to observe the disparate media forms that involved her, and the multiplicity of cultural fields to which those forms correspond. These imply a general historical shift for which Cunard might be seen as an emblem. Her father, Sir Bache Cunard, was heir to the fortune of the Cunard shipping line. Nancy, his only daughter, grew up on the family estate until her parents’ divorce in 1911, at which point she moved to London with her mother, an American socialite who styled herself Lady Emerald. She associated with a group of aristocratic intellectuals known as The Coterie, and gained some renown as an English modernist poet, publishing in the Sitwells’ *Wheels* anthologies and then in three limited-run volumes of her own, *Outlaws* (Elkin Mathews, 1921), *Sublunary* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1923), and *Parallax* (Hogarth Press, 1925). During this time, Cunard also became a striking contemporary icon, “the Gioconda of the Age,” in Harold Acton’s words, as famous for her androgynous look and cutting-edge fashion as she was for her literary writing.[28] Throughout the 1920s, she was a model for numerous portraits by artists including Wyndham Lewis, Oskar Kokoschka, and Constantin Brancusi, and the subject of portraits by photographers including Cecil Beaton and Man Ray (figs. 3–6).
Fig. 3. Percy Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957). *Nancy Cunard, Venice* (1922). Pencil and watercolor and pastel on paper. 51.2 x 33 cm. Courtesy British Council Collection. P122 © Wyndham Lewis and the estate of the late Mrs. G. A. Wyndham Lewis by kind permission of the Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust / Bridgeman Images.
Fig. 4. Oskar Kokoschka (1886-1980). *Nancy Cunard* (1924). Oil on canvas. 116 x 73 cm. Sprengel Museum, Hannover, Germany. Inv. No.: I,146. Photo credit: bpk Bildagentur / Michael Herling. © 2018 Fondation Oskar Kokoschka / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ProLitteris, Zürich.
Fig. 5. Constantin Brancusi, French (born Romania, 1876-1957). *Portrait of Nancy Cunard (also called Sophisticated Young Lady)*, 1925-1927. Walnut on marble base, 24 ¾ x 12 ½ x 4 3/8 inches (62.9 x 31.7 x 11.1 cm). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. Gift of the Hall Family Foundation, acquired from the Patsy and Raymond Nasher Collection, F99-33/3. Photo: Jamison Miller. Art © Succession Brancusi - All rights reserved (ARS) 2018.
Many of the images are well known to modernist scholars and have retained interest in themselves, but it is the fact of their circulation that I want to underscore. In one of Cunard’s surviving scrapbooks, a 1928 clipping from the Brisbane *Daily Standard* reports on her activities as avant-garde socialite, including by way of illustration one of Man Ray’s photographs, which shows Cunard in top hat, mask, and silk pajama suit, standing before the founder of Dada, Tristan Tzara, who is kneeling and kissing her hand (fig. 7). The appearance of this image in an Australian newspaper indicates not only the increasingly globalized distribution of her image (as well as that of the avant-garde), but also the overlapping but not unitary audiences for such images. Nor is this an isolated instance. Cunard’s scrapbooks contain many such clippings, showing different images, from Italian and German papers, and many of Beaton’s portraits of Cunard circulated internationally in the pages of *Vogue* (fig. 8). A notice for a gallery exhibition of Man Ray’s photography in the April 16, 1932 *New York Times* remarks on the “fireside familiarity” of his Cunard portraits.[29] Through all these examples one can see an older iconographic economy of artists and models (as muses), submitting to and in some sense benefitting from its diffusion in the new media: a new sociological relation based in part on, because incorporating, the older one, extending but also fundamentally transforming the cultural value of its iconography.
were not killed ought to have been. Perhaps, though, all the above social outcasts and Parnassian pariahs were deemed by St. John Adcock quite good enough to look after themselves. After all, the nightingale sings by night, and sings alone. And it is not the thrushes, linnets, larks, and blackbirds of the anthology who will feel the sting of that, only the sparrows and titmice.

THE DAILY STANDARD.
Brisbane, Queensland.

Date 6 SEP 1928
Fig. 7. Item from Australia's *Brisbane Daily Standard* (September 6, 1928), featuring Man Ray's photograph of Cunard with the Dadaist Tristan Tzara, pasted into one of Nancy Cunard's many scrapbooks, and perhaps provided by a professional clipping service. Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin. Man Ray, *Tristan Tzara kneeling to kiss Nancy Cunard's hand, Bal du Comte de Beaumont*, 1924. © Man Ray Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY / ADAGP, Paris 2018.
This transformation of Cunard’s iconicity is equally appreciable in the narrative, rather than the strictly visual, portraits of Cunard in the 1920s. As is true for the fine artists just named, the literary authors of the fictional portraits of Cunard were figures who knew their subject personally and were sometimes of her circle. Rather than affirming the mutual participation of artist and subject in the restricted field of avant-garde culture, or in the impersonal economy of cutting-edge fashion (both alike modes of hypostatizing Cunard as a mute icon), the authors trade on their proximity to the subject in a manner that is homologous with the work of the mass-distributed celebrity columnist Winchell. In contrast to the highbrow visual portraits, the literary metier is unambiguously middlebrow, the works organized around the scornful or merely maudlin representation of Cunard’s sexual freedom, allegorized accounts of the social interactions to which the authors had relatively privileged access. [30]

In Michael Arlen’s *The Green Hat* (1924), “Iris Storm” is a woman involved in a series of extramarital affairs that lead to her public disgrace; purporting to redeem her from the corruptions of her social world, her death at the novel’s conclusion can only be interpreted as punitive (fig. 9). Arlen’s portrait made a strong impression on D. H. Lawrence, who understood Iris Storm as an archetypally negative modern woman, and paid tribute four years later by depicting Arlen as the playwright Michaelis in *Lady Chatterly’s Lover*. [31] Still less ambiguously, among the many satirical portraits in Aldous Huxley’s *Point Counter Point* (1928) is that of the reckless and sexually dangerous “Lucy Tantamount,” “the terrible power of [whose] attraction” showed more clearly the image by which Cunard, “a disaster for any man,” would be known by the end of the 1920s. [32] Both books were best sellers, and *The Green Hat* was adapted first as a successful 1925 stage play starring Tallulah Bankhead, and then as the silent MGM feature *A Woman of Affairs* (1928), a film from Hollywood’s popular “fallen woman” subgenre that starred none other than Greta Garbo (fig. 10), whom Judith Brown has named “the figure who comes closest to bridging the gap between modernist character and media-age personality” (*Glamour in Six Dimensions*, 101). [33] Here, too, we can see a transition among media, with the successive adaptations of Arlen’s novel roughly
homologous with the increasingly massified distribution of Cunard's visual image from the canvas to the photograph to the wire service. While Cunard may have become less directly identifiable as her image was further distributed, it was also through these same processes that Cunard became more identifiable with the phenomenon of the image itself.[34]
From autonomous art object to diffusely distributed image, mute icon to fallen woman: this is the context from which Cunard began her project of deliberate reauthorization, a remaking that at first appears only circumstantially political. In 1928 she founded the Hours Press, which became among the most successful and prolific of the modernist small presses, discovering Samuel Beckett and publishing work by Ezra Pound, Louis Aragon, Bob Brown, Laura Riding, Havelock Ellis, and others. She had by this time begun an association with the French Surrealists, (especially Louis Aragon), then in their radical left phase, which was also sexually radical, as emblematized in L’Age D’Or, the banned Buñuel and Dali film Cunard would help screen and distribute in 1930. And during this time she also met and began a romantic relationship with the African-American musician Henry Crowder. It was through Crowder that Cunard was educated and radicalized on the subject of race in the United States.[35] And it was because of this relationship with Crowder that Cunard was disowned by her mother, an event she publicly denounced in her Crisis article. She expanded on this denunciation in Black Man and White Ladyship, a privately-circulated pamphlet that would eventually be published in an English-language journal in Paris and then serialized without her approval in the Daily Mirror, the Hearst paper that was home to Winchell's column. In April 1931, the sentencing of the nine Scottsboro defendants provided impetus for what became the Negro anthology, a project that transformed a key genre of the restricted field of literary production (the anthology) into an 855-page reference work that is the first major documentation of blackness as an international fact and concern.[36]

While much of this story may be familiar, what must be emphasized is that Cunard's audacious political self-making transpired in a cultural field already saturated with images of Cunard authored by other agencies, both individual and institutional. As Marcus alone has stressed, Cunard’s ability to assemble the anthology depended to large degree on her ability to publicize the project, and that this ability derived from her earlier, apolitical, celebrity, which this project was attempting to exploit and reauthorize.[37]
Because this project of reauthorization was in its very nature reliant on mediation and distribution, it is not easy to assess the degree of agency Cunard might have independently asserted in a given instance. But one final literary portrait will demonstrate the political stakes that were recognized as attendant upon her efforts. Published in 1932, the former *imagiste* Richard Aldington’s vicious fictional elegy, “Now Lies She There,” avers the ruinous power on the Cunard-manque “Constance” of an interracial postwar Paris where “the sound of ten thousand jazz bands, with the ominous tom-tom undertone beating on the nerves” provided the soundtrack as “restless feet slid and stamped, and the niggers grinned over the drums, and the joyless rejoiced without joy.” Particularly and almost hilariously overcompensatory is Aldington’s figuration of Cunard’s relationship with Crowder. Transforming the African-American jazz musician Crowder into “Eddie,” a blue-eyed, emasculated lion tamer, forms the core of a racist fantasy that allows Aldington to represent and withhold Cunard’s sexual relationships with black men, while lampooning her intellectual and political interest in Africa: Constance travels to Africa not to collect materials for a radical anthology, but to engage in the frivolous and suspect pursuit of going on safari. The story’s aggressively punitive conclusion leaves Constance, “educated beyond her station,” brutally scarred after an attack from a female rival, living in “one of the French colonies in North Africa . . . with an Arab [where she] wears native women’s costume so that she can hide her disfigurement with the veil.”[38] Viewed in relation to Arlen’s and Huxley’s earlier, opportunistic novels, the ferocity of Aldington’s spite—literally imagining Cunard’s disfigurement—betrays an anxiety that is no longer confined to Cunard’s sexual license, but is also an index of her activities related to race politics. These are precisely the issues Wiggins would reference in his letter two years later.

**McKay as Media Theorist**

What inspired Aldington’s fear and loathing was also what informed Claude McKay’s approving correspondence, which began at the moment Aldington was writing his story in December 1931. McKay’s first letter gratefully acknowledged receiving the offprint of the article in *The Crisis* and accepted the invitation to contribute to the anthology. At the end of the letter he appended an altogether more enthusiastic postscript:
P.S. I feel very excited about your book, of course, because I think from your attitude and angle of approach, if I surmise rightly, you will produce a fresh and artistically stimulating contribution. We poor Negroes, it seems to me, are literally smothered under the reams of stale, hackneyed, repetitious stuff done by our friends, our moral champions and ourselves that never strikes people piercingly anywhere . . . but it is unimaginable that you could be handicapped or allow yourself to be by the social-racial reactions that hamper us sometimes unconsciously even. And so I hope the stuff you are going to put out will be a revelation and inspiration to us.[39]

Why, in his first letter to Cunard, does McKay find it “unimaginable” that she will be immune to the “stale, hackneyed, repetitious” political-racial advocacy that has preceded her? The circular advertisement for the anthology, which McKay had received, described Cunard’s plan for the book to be “entirely Documentary, exclusive of romance or fiction,” and specifically solicited “outspoken criticism, comment and comparison from the Negro” in the form of “individual documents, letters, photographs.”[40] Particularly since it accorded with McKay’s own archival sensibility, it is conceivable that this is what he applauds with the phrase “your attitude and angle of approach.” Yet although McKay would assist Cunard with the gathering of material for the book—writing letters of introduction and giving advice in advance of her trip to Jamaica in August 1932—he did not here, and would only rarely later, expand on the prospective anthology’s “angle of approach.”

He would, however, have much more to say about Cunard’s “attitude,” as in a letter from April of the following year, composed after her second trip to the United States and Harlem. Lamenting the Baltimore Afro-American’s moralistic coverage of her publicly interracial relationship McKay writes, “It would be a hopeful sign if [the black press] could show a break from tradition in your case. . . . It is allright to have shouting headlines against lynching and race prejudice. . . . But it’s quite another thing to be confronted with prejudice mixed with a person like you who are frankly unconventional and don’t care about social or traditional standards.”[41] Emphasizing her comportment, or attitude, McKay concludes his letter by inviting Cunard to consider her public significance in relation to the controversy that had met his own bestselling, and sexually suggestive, novel Home to Harlem (1928)—a book whose raunchiness had famously caused Du Bois to write, “I feel distinctly like taking a bath” (quoted in Lewis, When Harlem Was in Vogue, 225). Irrespective of its approach, that is, the possibility of Cunard’s anthology may also have recommended itself because McKay believed its editor’s public reputation might provoke or shame the culturally conservative arbiters of the New Negro Renaissance in the 1920s. It was shortly after writing this letter that McKay developed his criticism of New Negro intellectuals in an essay titled “A Negro Writer to His Critics,” where he argued that “the laudable efforts of intelligent Negro groups to protect
their race from the slander of its detractors after Emancipation” had left as its legacy “a kind of censorship” of works by black writers.[42] Such censorship could be moral, as in the case of Du Bois’s censuring review, but also political, as when Alain Locke had changed the title of McKay’s polemical sonnet “The White House” to “White Houses” prior to its publication in *The New Negro.*[43]

McKay was writing from an exile that provided both political and sexual refuge, and it seems likely that he was responding not only to the anthology project as Cunard described it, but also to the multifarious history of Cunard’s avant-garde and sexually-iconoclastic public image. Indeed, among McKay’s earlier writings it is not only the polymorphous sexuality of *Home to Harlem* that suggests a reason for his interest in Cunard; she may also have appeared as an avatar of McKay’s earlier social criticism. During his extended Moscow residence, and five years before *Home to Harlem,* McKay had published at Trotsky’s request a polemical text titled *The Negroes in America.*[44] There, in a chapter titled “Sex and Economics,” McKay had constructed an elaborate argument about the way the capitalist bourgeoisie benefits from racism within the white working class, and the way this racism was perpetuated by means of a luridly phobic construction of miscegenation as the racist alibi for lynching. Because of the special role reserved for the white female body in this system, McKay asserted, “the Negro question is inseparably connected with the question of woman’s liberation.”[45] The success of feminism, reciprocally, depended on the eradication of lynching and its supporting ideologies. Although by the end of the 1930s it would be more characteristic for McKay to emphasize the necessity of black self-determination, his sympathetic letters to Cunard—“prejudice mixed with a person like you who [doesn’t] care about social . . . standards”—suggest that what he most appreciated about Cunard’s image was the way it too represented racial and sexual liberation as inseparable.

As McKay and Cunard both recognized, the newly expansive publicity institutions of the late modernist period offered the possibility of distributing such representations far more widely than could have been the case just a few years before. Cunard’s awareness of the political value of such publicity would be evident in an interracial sunbathing and dancing party she hosted in a posh London hotel on July 4, 1933. “Capitalizing on the 1920s suntanning craze,” as Kaplan observes, “with all the Negrophilia it implied,” the event was conceived as a British fundraiser for the Scottsboro Defense Fund, and was duly reported in newspapers in Pittsburgh, South Africa, Sri Lanka, and Jamaica (*Miss Anne in Harlem*, 318–19). The pointedly ironic coordination of the sunbathing fundraiser, however, instructively contrasts with the more precarious and improvisational media experiment Cunard engaged the year before during her second visit to Harlem. It was this event that initiated an intensive set of exchanges with McKay.
Cunard had first visited New York with Henry Crowder in July 1931. It was during this visit that she had met Du Bois and placed the article in *The Crisis*. She returned without Crowder in April 1932 in order to research and solicit material for the *Negro* anthology. In early May, during a lull in the daily reporting of the Lindbergh baby kidnapping, the New York tabloids (the *New York American*, the *Daily News*, and Winchell’s *Daily Mirror*) began to run front-page stories on Cunard’s arrival in Harlem, and her residence at the traditionally black-only Grampion Hotel. The papers also falsely insinuated that she had come to solicit a sexual relationship with Paul Robeson, thus overlaying the salacious intrigue of interracial sex on top of Cunard’s avowedly political project (fig. 11–12). The story was quickly distributed nationally over wire services, and at least one newsreel presented the story as well. Cunard reported to McKay that by the time she left the United States in July she had received “about 100 clippings from all over America” distributing the misinformation.[46] The broadly distributed misinformation in turn elicited a proliferation of hate mail and death threats, enabled and passively solicited by the papers’ identification of the Grampion and dutiful communication of the street address for the rooming house Cunard stayed in afterwards.
CUNARD HEIRESS FOUND IN HARLEM!

MAY DAY WASH-OUT!—Rads and rain didn’t mix well. The result was the city’s most peaceful May Day in years. At Union Square the demonstrators staged this parade, which was more wet than real.

TRIED TO END IT ALL—Though she boasts a millionaire father, a successful though estranged husband, and prominent friendships, Gertrude B. De Witt sought livelihood by driving a taxi in Brooklyn. But fares were few. In despair, she swallowed poison tablets. Now she is in Kings County Hospital in critical condition.

MOVES INTO HARLEM—The Hon. Nancy Cunard (above), heiress daughter of Lady Cunard, has taken up residence in Harlem’s Grampion Hotel, which caters exclusively to colored clientele. Miss Cunard’s association with colored friends has been “bombshell” to titled London.

PARK AVENUE WHEELS STOP TURNING!—These roulette wheels and other play devices didn’t stop on their own accord. Police had a hand in that. Entering one of Park Avenue’s swankiest gambling spots—at No. 625—police interrupted the play of excessively garbed men and women and made two arrests, George Niles, 58, and Joseph Evans, 72, were booked on gambling charges. And the wheels repose in police station.
Fig. 11. Front page of May 2, 1932 New York *Daily Mirror*. “Cunard Heiress Found in Harlem!” The New York tabloids erroneously referred to Cunard as an heiress and mistitled her “The Hon. Nancy Cunard.”
Cunard Heiress Picks Harlem Hotel as Home

By JAMES WHITAKER.

Copyright, 1932, by the Daily Mirror, Inc.

Her keen interest in the Negro race, in general, and in the career of Paul Robeson, the singing genius of his race, in particular, has led the Hon. Nancy Cunard, fair-skinned daughter of Lady Cunard, and apparent heiress of the Cunard steamship fortunes, to take residence in the Gramercy Hotel at No. 128 St. Nicholas Ave., in Harlem, a popular-priced hotelty catering to a Negro clientele.

Seeming prejudices, which are just as strong among her aristocratic mother's titled London friends as among the social-regal New Yorkers with whom the Hon. Nancy has blood ties, the rebel daughter of the late Sir Basil E. Cunard has elected to throw her social lot in with the Harlemites, who have welcomed her as a friend of their leader, Paul Robeson.

So fast was Lady Cunard, who has sworn to her social affiliations, for the daughter of the late Sir Basil E. Cunard has elected to throw her social lot in with the Harlemites, who have welcomed her as a friend of their leader, Paul Robeson.

But in a hotel, the Cunardites, who have sworn to the social affiliations, for the daughter of the late Sir Basil E. Cunard has elected to throw her social lot in with the Harlemites, who have welcomed her as a friend of their leader, Paul Robeson.

This was the situation. In a hotel, the Cunardites, who have sworn to the social affiliations, for the daughter of the late Sir Basil E. Cunard has elected to throw her social lot in with the Harlemites, who have welcomed her as a friend of their leader, Paul Robeson.

For the first time since she began the battle to have her black friend received on an equal basis with white men, the Hon. Nancy has now bravely public discussion with the Daily Mirror may exclusively present today the history of Nancy's friend with her mother and London society, dating back about eighteen months to the moment when Margot Asquith, Lady Ox.

Margot Asquith (Lady Oxford)

Girl Taxi Driver, Of Wealthy Family, Swallows Poison

By JANE FRANKLIN.

The young, pretty, fair-haired driver, wearing a white shirt and tie, was seen by several people at the Gramercy Hotel yesterday. In spite of her parents' and contemporaries, the young woman lived with her wealthy mother in不良信息...
In the medium term this had the effect of successful political intimidation; Cunard was persuaded to reconsider a planned trip to the South and instead retreated outside of the city to work on the anthology. Cunard would later publish some of the milder examples of the hate mail in the anthology, and by December brought separate lawsuits against Winchell and the *Daily Mirror.*[47] Her immediate response, however, was to attempt to counter press defamation through the institution of the press itself. On the day the story broke, May 2, she staged a press conference at the Grampion denying the sexual insinuations and demanding the press contribute to the Scottsboro defense fund by way of apology (fig. 13–15).[48] The Harlem press conference, like the sunbathing party, has traditionally been taken as evidence of Cunard's overreaching political self-regard. Such critical accounts, however, give implicit credence to the dubious possibility that Cunard would have expected the press to accept her invitation to donate to the defense fund. What should be emphasized instead is Cunard's belief in the value of the press conference, and the invitation itself, as publicity in a context where the limits and possibilities of such an activity were not fully known. The stagier later example of the sunbathing party indicates the learned importance of carefully managing the quality that would today be called messaging. But the incident at the Grampion elicited effects both nationally and internationally that Cunard did not foresee, and could not immediately interpret. Writing from Tangier, McKay followed the events intensively, and offered analysis and interpretation of his own.
CAPONE Loses Plea, Must Serve 11 YEARS

AUTO TOMB OF 1—Dead man, identified as Howard Rickerton, was found in auto which is being salvaged from the Hudson, off Christopher St. George Mardon, rescued him, arrested on suspicion of homicide. He refused to talk.

HER FRIEND "OF COLOR REMAINS UN-NAMED." "If you please, we'll just stick to a John Doe," said Nancy Cunard, English society girl, in dismissing the question of the identity of the "genuine of color" whom she presented to a startled London as her personal friend. Miss Cunard, interviewed at the Grampon Hotel, all-Negro hostel in Harlem, revealed she is getting out an anthology on Negro writings. Trys to go on shown with her, was among Harlem writers at interview.
Fig. 13. Front page of May 3, 1932 *Daily Mirror* featuring picture of Cunard with an anonymous Taylor Gordon (“Her friend ‘of color’ remains unnamed!”), and subheading announcing Cunard’s intention to aid the Scottsboro defendants.
Fig. 14. Inset image from page three of May 3, 1932 *Daily Mirror* stating that Cunard “refuses to name Negro friend” and that she “deplored fact that her mission here had resulted in mention of Paul Robeson, Negro singer.”
CAPONE OFF TO PRISON!

ROCKEFELLER 3D, JUROR—Possessor of a name that connotes fabulous wealth, John D. Rockefeller, 3d, son of John D. Jr., was chosen juror in General Sessions trial of a Filipino for alleged $96 theft.

ON THE STAND at the Legislative hearing, William O'Neil, president of the General Tire & Rubber Co., is shown testifying to Seabury that Senator Hastings' employment by the Equitable, at $1,000 a month, was due to his knowledge of transportation. Seabury managed to disclose Equitable sought throttle-hold on transportation.

QUITs HARLEM HOTEL—Miss Nancy Cunard, British Peeress, has vanished from the Grammion Hotel, in Harlem, without leaving a forwarding address. The hotel's exclusive inmates looked with disfavor upon the white woman's desire to be taken up by Harlem society, according to the manager, Arthur Joseph, who did...
In July Cunard traveled from New York to the West Indies in the company of the black Bostonian A. A. Colebrooke, with scheduled stops in Cuba and Jamaica (fig. 16). Aided by McKay’s suggestions and introductions, the visit to Jamaica was largely successful. Cuba, however, was another story, as Cunard would later describe at length to McKay:

These dogs got busy while we were on the sea, with the result that in Havana . . . a perfect army of reporters came out on the tender armed with cameras. Continuing our line of “nothing to say” (and indeed why should one have to waste time with the vultures gassing about the rottenness of America etc when they’re going to fabricate their own crap?) we had a whole gang of what the press calls “incidents”; some of them fought in the customs; the camera man did not get much and the whole thing went on for about three hours, to the accompaniment of touts and following taxis and agents waiting at the station, at the post, on the sea-front, to see where we would go. On top of this the authorities had almost tried to prevent us from landing and were bloody rude. What is it all about, one wonders? . . . So now I have sampled both means of “dealing with the press,” having given them a mouthful in NY in May, and having tried to avoid them. . . . It doesn’t matter a damn, but it’s a hell of a bore to be recognised and spoken to everywhere, as happened in Cuba.[49]

Viewed with the distance of eighty-five years, it is tempting to fasten upon Cunard’s naiveté: in Harlem she had demanded the attention of the press; in Cuba she is indignant about the way their attention interfered with her work on behalf of the anthology. Like Wiggins’s “uncertainty” about Cunard’s methods, however, this naiveté must be seen as having been in part effected by the novelty of the media situation—one in which the political was thoroughly, but newly, imbricated with the new institutions and media of celebrity: “a perfect army of reporters . . . armed with cameras. . . . it’s a hell of a bore to be recognised and spoken to everywhere.” The reporters, it is important to emphasize, were not only local reporters, and were in many cases like Winchell and Edgar Wiggins serving internationally distributed media institutions with diverse political interests and connections.
Three men who drove up in automobiles while the inspection was on last night, saying they had orders to unload part of the shipment, were arrested.

Hon. Nancy Shipmate Of Negro

By ERSKINE GOSLING.

Her intense interest in the Negro race undulled by weeks in Harlem hotels and boarding houses, the Hon. Nancy Cunard, daughter of Lady Cunard, and once the heiress apparent for the Cunard steamship fortunes, set sail for Havana yesterday, accompanied by an unmistakable "Jackamoo".

The Hon. Nancy and her dark Barney.

They realized they relaxed in order to permit comfort her.

Although stiff J. I. Scott announced the death was parently suicide, he began an investigation and summoned a jury to meet at once.

Wife Colla...
NANCY CUNARD.

complexioned companion arrived together at the Wall St. pier, from which the S. S. Orizaba sailed shortly after noon, to be greeted by a delegation of cameramen and reporters. The Negro, on the passenger lists as Anselm Collbrooke, No. 498 Manhattan Ave., poked one arm around his fair companion, and with the other held a sports coat in front of her face.

Continued on Page 5
Mrs. Barney Faints
As Jury Frees Her

LONDON, July 6—Beautiful Elvira Scott-Barney, sister of an American radio singer, was freed today from the charge of murdering her lover.

The trial lasted less than two hours, the jury hearing the case in Old Bailey court. It was no surprise that there was no proof that Mrs. Barney had anything to do with the death of her husband Michael Scott. The jury, after a few minutes, acquitted her of the charge.

Mrs. Barney is a well-known figure in the world of entertainment, having appeared in several films and on stage. She is also a successful businesswoman, owning several properties in London.

Hon. Nancy Shipmate
Of Negro

By ERSKINE GOSLING

Her intense interest in the Negro race undaunted by weeks in Harlem hotels and boarding houses, the Hon. Nancy Cunard, daughter of the late Cunard Line founder, is not for Havanna, but rather for Havana yesterday, accompanied by an unmarried mother, Nancy Cunard, and a negro partner.

Mrs. Elvira Delores Barney, the defendant, is a well-known figure in London society. She is married to Michael Scott, a successful businessman.

Nancy Cunard

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Mrs. Elvira Delores Barney, the defendant, is a well-known figure in London society. She is married to Michael Scott, a successful businessman.
These were the events described in the French- and English-language clippings McKay sent Cunard along with his letter of August 20. In addition to remarking on the varieties of emphasis and implication manifested in the discrete press accounts, McKay also notably makes a point of informing Cunard that he had received these accounts *in advance* of her letter that described the events to him personally: “Before [your letters] came to hand, I was informed of your movements by the newspapers. First the ‘scandal’ of the Grampion appeared in the French-Moroccan newspapers and the New York Herald (Paris) carried as straight unsensational news your leaving Harlem and arriving in Jamaica” (fig. 17). [50] The fact that McKay remarks upon this, too, suggests the novelty of this kind of information, and of its ready international availability.
From past experience, however, McKay was able also to speculate more deeply about the relationship of the press and political surveillance. In his letter of April 30, he had already suggested that the unsympathetic reception of Cunard by black newspapers likely owed to the fact that “many of the Negro weeklies [were] subsidized by either the Republican or Northern Democratic local machine. And so like the press everywhere (only perhaps a little more) the Negro press is ultra conservative and regular in anything that concerns morals and politics.”[51] “[V]exed about all that vile notoriety” following her to Cuba, McKay goes on to suggest ominously that the press might be acting, wittingly or unwittingly, as the more direct agent of state interest. “[I]t seems more than the Press under that,” McKay writes, “and I have a conviction . . . that it might be the work of the nefarious British Secret Service.” Because Black Man and White Ladyship “must have infuriated the higher-ups who are engaged in a grim struggle to uphold Anglo-Saxon prestige and British Imperialism,” McKay surmises, the Secret Service will likely follow her travels and “endeavor to embarrass [her] and defeat [her] work.” Over the course of ten pages, McKay goes on to describe similar difficulties experienced by friends and associates, before summarizing, “I think you’ll find yourself up against real opposition and intrigue if your programme go beyond the artistic” (McKay to Cunard, Aug. 20, 1932).

Taken as advice, this valedictory comment may accord with Kalliney’s reading of McKay as a writer “with strong political views” who nevertheless “assert[s] the need for an aesthetic sphere purified of political dogma” (Commonwealth of Letters, 68). It does not contradict this judgment to point out that what McKay offers in this letter is less advice than it is a grave assessment of the general situation of the global system of media and information in 1932. And as we have seen, it was this same violation of the “artistic” that McKay had earlier applauded in Cunard’s “attitude and angle of approach,” and which had also distinguished the Negro anthology, as Cunard had promoted it to McKay and others.

This letter should in any event be sufficient evidence to qualify McKay’s later negative assessment of Cunard in his 1937 memoir, and of the Black Man and White Ladyship pamphlet, which McKay memorably describes as providing “the impression that the Cunard daughter enjoys taking a Negro stick to beat the Cunard mother” (Long Way, 262). Warning against the authority of the autobiography, Gary Holcomb has gone so far as to suggest that the specific tenor of the autobiography calculatedly sanitized McKay’s political radicalism in order to allow his eventual return to the United States in 1934. My point, however, is not to promote McKay’s earlier assessment of Cunard as the authentic one, but rather to understand the conditions that allowed McKay to seem so receptive to Cunard and her work in 1931 and 1932. This was a situation in which the cultural authority of modernist literary culture could still be viewed.
optimistically as exerting an influence “beyond the artistic,” amid the expanding economy of media—without, that is, being incorporated or corrupted by it. At the same time, Cunard and McKay alike hail the possibility of the discursive reauthorization of the Cunardian icon within this newly distributed environment. This was strikingly evident in one of McKay’s earliest missives to Cunard.

Literature in the System of Information

In his letter of February 26, 1932, McKay had proposed as possible contributions to the Negro anthology four separate essay subjects. Though in a complexly mediated way, one topic was freighted with special symbolic as well as historical value. McKay asked Cunard if she had heard of the medieval-era “Black Sultan of Morocco,” who “built the three great Moorish monuments, the Koutoubia at Marrakesh, the Hassan Tower of Rabaat and the Giralda of Seville”:

This sultan was married to an Englishwoman and it is said that it was she who induced the sultan to make Marrakesh again the southern capital of Morocco and embellish it. The city had been abandoned by the Merinides dynasty and when she saw it in the midst of a vast tropical plain at the foot of the great snow-covered Atlas she was so captivated that she said she would become the wife of the sultan only on condition that he made it his capital.

The Moors called her the Morning Sun and the long panegyre on her tomb calls her the “free, the pure, the pious.” The tomb is sanctuary for the Moorish women and once a year is held there the festival named after her: Lalla Shellah.[52]

The proposed piece appears to be a part of a larger project—a novel about Morocco that he would also describe as an “autobiographical book”—for which McKay would apply for Guggenheim support in 1933. As Edwards notes, two short pieces conceivably from that project, including “Lalla Shellah,” exist as unpublished material among McKay’s papers at Yale; the Black Sultan and Lalla Shellah would also appear later in a sonnet McKay wrote in the 1940s.[53]

Framed as it is here, however, in response to the internationally famous Cunard’s solicitation of contributions to the Negro anthology, it is difficult to mistake the invitation—and Cunard did not mistake it—for the editor of the forthcoming anthology to imagine herself as a “Morning Sun” for the twentieth century.[54] Pursuing the allegory McKay implies, the Negro anthology might stand as a contemporary “monument,” a suggestion that anticipated the words of Raymond Michelet, one Cunard’s chief collaborators on the anthology, who would write, “[i]t was a question of erecting a monument to black culture—of denouncing fallacious arguments about the benefits of civilization so generously brought to the blacks” (quoted in Chisholm, 204–05). Composed with the cooperation, and even “inspiration” (to
recall the words of McKay's first letter to Cunard), of a white female ally, the allegory accords with the hopes for racial and feminist collaboration that McKay expresses in *The Negroes in America*. The first words of the unpublished “Lalla Shellah” essay are: “Native Morocco offers an interesting study in miscegenation.”[55]

McKay's suggestive use of the historical record can in this way also be seen as a bid to participate in the media economy of which he had theretofore been the audience, fashioning himself as the author of the latest and most politically magisterial of Cunard's many mass-mediated personae. This he proposed to do by availing himself, in a different register, of the fictive and factual hybrid roman-à-clef form that had disseminated mediated images of Cunard since the 1920s. That this might be accomplished in a work that presents itself as nonfiction is knowing commentary on the rapidly expanding global economy of information, powerful and unreliable, then in its process of formation.

Notably, such an interpretation is possible even if one takes the charier view that McKay's proposal meant simply to flatter a powerful potential literary benefactor, and that he had relatively little investment in the allegory he tacitly submitted for Cunard to consider. (Indeed much of their correspondence throughout 1932 concerned Cunard's efforts to place McKay's novel *Banana Bottom* with a London publisher.) Such a reading is especially plausible given the fact that in early 1933 McKay finally elected to submit a different piece to Cunard, an autobiographical sketch titled “Up to Date.” But it is surely significant that, even as McKay would later publicly disavow any allegiance to Cunard and espouse systematically the importance of black self-reliance, the technique suggested in the Lalla Shellah proposal anticipates McKay's late fiction and clarifies his idiosyncratic approach to archival practices.

Here Jean-Christophe Cloutier's discovery and reading of McKay's lost novel of 1941, *Amiable with Big Teeth*, published at last by Penguin in 2017, is instructive. Written in New York after his break with Cunard, and in the context of the rise of fascism in Europe, *Amiable with Big Teeth* is a roman-à-clef concerning the “Aid-to-Ethiopia” organizations that emerged in Harlem in response to Mussolini's invasion in October 1935. Cloutier describes *Amiable with Big Teeth* as “McKay's most realized literary expression of his desire for greater group unity among African Americans. [Here], McKay's archival sensibility is shaped by his ideals of black self-reliance rather than by a strict adherence to historical truth. In this respect, the political, imaginative, and archival are . . . intertwined.”[56] Cloutier observes that McKay had characteristically taken care about factual representation throughout his writing career, and, like Edwards, notes the enthusiasm with which he composed his own archive. Such a historical sensibility also marks *Amiable with Big Teeth*, but as Cloutier notes, the possible unreliability of the archival record is a major theme of the novel, “evidentiary challenges surrounding authentication becom[ing] a prime concern of the narrative” (“Amiable with Big Teeth,” 565).
In the war of information McKay constructs, protagonists and antagonists—“predatory communist and . . . heroic Ethiopian”—each fabricate documents, which circulate in a media economy defined by the porous boundaries between political and celebrity reportage. One minor character, the splendidly-named Pat Conman, begins a career editing the *Broadway Balcony* (a clear reference to Winchell’s “On Broadway” column), “which specialized in brief items full of malice and innuendos about stage people.”[57] When the *Balcony* folds in 1933, Conman goes on to organize artist and workers through the Popular Front’s *Labor Herald*, which actively disseminates propaganda discrediting the black-identified Hands to Ethiopia organization. Those fabricated reports accrue further authority as they are distributed through national wire services, a process McKay had already observed in the press coverage of Cunard’s Harlem visit of 1932.[58]

But as Cloutier recognizes, this practice of fabulation is one that McKay the novelist engages as well, in order further to indict the opportunism of communist operatives in Harlem: “[McKay] litters his novel with forgeries: when the letter of the [black-identified] Lij proves to be a fake, we are reminded that archival material also depends on narrative.” In this way McKay establishes what Cloutier calls a “counterarchival” practice in which “McKay appropriates for himself and in the service of his community, the strategies usually reserved for institutional or imperial governance” (“*Amiable with Big Teeth,*” 572). Viewed in the context of McKay's late lost novel, McKay's Lalla Shellah proposal can thus be seen as an earlier experiment in counterarchival practice, one that would have combined the mediating techniques of narrative historiography together with those that distributed the celebrity image in the service of crafting a transhistorical and international black consciousness.

Appreciating the continuities among the projects, as well as the differences emblematized in McKay's subsequent turn to black self-reliance, is to grasp the transforming conditions of a media economy, one in which the progressive possibilities of the technologically mediated image—such as one finds hailed in Benjamin’s writing—gave way by the time of the Second World War to a more general understanding of the way media had become dominated by the institutions of propaganda, and used more unambiguously in the interests of the state. The year the McKay-Cunard correspondence broke off, 1933, was the same year that saw the introduction of Roosevelt’s fireside chats in the United States, Hitler’s regular radio broadcasts, and Joseph Goebbels’s establishment of a Department of Film in Nazi Germany. Our current situation offers baleful testimony to the abiding authority of the convergence of celebrity media, state-authored propaganda, and political power within a single economy of information. The present article might in a small way contribute to a genealogy of this situation: two decades after his column disseminated misinformation about Cunard’s Harlem visit, Walter Winchell became a “vital ally” of Joseph McCarthy’s lawyer Roy Cohn during the HUAC investigations; two decades after that, Cohn became political mentor to an ambitious real estate developer named Donald Trump.[59] McKay's late
aesthetic practices suggest that he may have deemed the archive—taken in both the institutional and the Derridean senses—as the most hopeful location for long-term political action. For her part, Nancy Cunard never again availed herself of the institutions of mass publicity, even as she remained an active exponent of antifascist politics, from her coordination of the pamphlet *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War* (1937) to her work as a propaganda monitor in London during the Second World War.

Notes

This article has been benefitted greatly from the comments of many readers; I give special thanks to Jonathan P. Eburne and Sabine Haenni. Excerpts from three letters by McKay to Nancy Cunard (December 1, 1931; February 26, 1932; August 20, 1932) are used with the permission of the Literary Estate for the Works of Claude McKay. Permission to quote Cunard’s letters to Claude McKay has been granted by Robert Bell, executor of the Estate of Nancy Cunard. Permission to quote from Nancy Cunard’s papers has also been granted by the Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin.


[3] David Trotter has proposed 1927 as the key year of technological transition for Britain in particular, noting that it saw “[t]he advent of synchronous sound in cinema, the marketing of a television or ‘televisor’ set, the crescendo of the campaign to define telephony as a social medium, the Imperial Wireless and Cable Conference that recommended the merger of all British communications interests, [and] the invention of a further range of semisynthetic plastics such as cellophane and cellulose acetate” (David Trotter, *Literature in the First Media Age: Britain between the Wars* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013], 36–37).

[4] “Un Autre «Grand Scandale»! / Miss Nancy Cunard entreprend une campagne en faveur des nègres et de leurs arts / Une riche et hautaine société de New-York est actuellement scandalisée par la conduite sensationnelle de l’un de ses enfants terribles . . . L’importance du scandale est manifeste, si l’on tient compte du fait que Nancy Cunard est la première personne blanche qui soit jamais descendue au Grampien [sic].” (“Another ‘Big Scandal’! / Miss Nancy Cunard Launches Campaign for Negroes and Their Arts. / Rich and haughty New York society is currently scandalized by the sensational behavior of one of its enfants terrible . . . The importance of the scandal is obvious, considering that Nancy Cunard is the first white person ever to descend to the Grampion [Hotel].”)

[6] For its part, McKay’s personal archive contains, as Brent Hayes Edwards has written, “a remarkable range of photographs: a small trove of images with friends in Russia in 1922; documents from political meetings and literary events; publicity shots of black performers, athletes, and artists; casual snapshots and photobooth shots both in Europe and in North Africa; and inscribed portraits of unidentified individuals” (Brent Hayes Edwards, “The Taste of the Archive,” *Callaloo* 35, no. 4 (2012): 943–72, 948).


[10] In *Miss Anne in Harlem*, Carla Kaplan describes the reaction of “an eminent historian and senior colleague” to a recent lecture on Cunard at the New York Public Library: “I knew Nancy Cunard, and she was crazy, I tell you! . . . She was crazy! I knew her, I tell you, and she was crazy!” Kaplan “took . . . a few
days to calm down enough to do the math. It was not impossible that [he] had met Nancy Cunard. But
given her death in 1965 and his age, he could not have been more than six years old when she died”
340).
[11] Kaplan writes, “[t]hat was Nancy's central notion: that one could not only identify with others but also
be—or become—them. . . . Her notion was that identity itself, not just our regard for others' identities,
should be fundamentally reshaped and experienced as fluid, voluntary, open, alterable. That politics of
identification was an idea born of privilege—the social mobility that comes with wealth—but what made
Nancy Cunard so interesting was how heedless she was of leaving that privilege behind” (Miss Anne in
Harlem, 287).
[12] “The post-Harlem Shadows (1922) trek which internationalized McKay's rendition of the New Negro, a
decade of touring through Europe, the Soviet Union, and North Africa, was fueled by something of an
obligatory Black Atlanticism. Even before McKay reached Paris, planetary modernism's hometown, in
1925, he could not go home to Harlem. FBI orders to detain him at the United States border had been
issued to customs officials in ports from New York to Los Angeles. A few years later, McKay's ties to the
Communist International and to Moroccan anticolonialism resulted in a similar inability to revisit Jamaica,
the birthplace he never glimpsed after 1912“ (William J. Maxwell, “Global Poetics and State-Sponsored
Transnationalism: A Response to Jahan Ramazani,” American Literary History 18, no. 2 [2006]: 360–64,
363. Emphasis added).
Modernism/modernity 17, no. 2 (2010): 313–29. See also Karen Leick, Gertrude Stein and the Making of
an American Celebrity (New York: Routledge, 2009).
University Press, 2009), 12.
University Press, 2011), 13, 6. Cheng's argument could be profitably extended, notably, to Barbara Ker-
Seymer's notorious photographic portraits of Cunard, some of which were solarized to give Cunard the
illusion of having black skin. Although the photographs amply illustrate Cunard's political turn, employing
her mediated image in the service of those politics, it also appears to be the case that Cunard chose in
the end not to circulate them. I have decided for this reason not to consider the Ker-Seymer photographs
in this essay. Marcus, who first discovered the photographs, discusses them in “Bonding and Bondage.”


[23] “Walter Winchell— On Broadway,” *Daily Mirror*, May 2, 1932, 19. See also, in the same issue, James Whitaker, “Cunard Heiress Picks Harlem Hotel as Home,” *Daily Mirror*, May 2, 1932, 3–4, and coverage on several subsequent days. A telling, and for present purposes ironic, confirmation of the social authority of Winchell’s column consists in the fact that Winchell was not actively writing his column at the time the Cunard reports appeared under his byline in the *Mirror*. In his February 8 column, he appeared to have predicted a mafia killing one day in advance, which led to wide public speculation in rival columns about Winchell’s own imminent assassination. Winchell collapsed on April 16, and was forced to take a leave of absence that lasted until June 1. See Gabler, *Winchell*, 155–60.

[24] Wiggins to Cunard, April 9, 1934, Nancy Cunard Collection, Harry Ransom Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin, box 20, folder 10.


[26] Kalliney has alertly observed that “[d]espite her outspoken and controversial political views, few of Cunard’s potential black contributors seemed deeply troubled by her political posturing. In stark contrast to the scholars who have condemned Negro, her African American and colonial contemporaries registered few objections to her political agenda” (*Commonwealth of Letters*, 68).

[27] The testimony of Wiggins and McKay illustrates the distinction Gabler draws between celebrity and fame. In Leo Braudy’s gloss, “Gabler argues that the difference between a celebrity and a famous person is that we always have the possibility of encountering the former but not the latter in our normal lives” (Leo Braudy, “Knowing the Performer from the Performance: Fame, Celebrity, and Literary Studies,” *PMLA* 126, no. 4 [2011]: 1070–75, 1073).


[30] As Tory Young has observed, neither of Cunard’s biographers has distanced herself from this tendency, emphasizing sex as the motivation and instrument of her social and political engagement (“Nancy Cunard’s Black Man and White Ladyship,” 156).

[31] See Trotter, Literature in the First Media Age, 104.

[32] Aldous Huxley, Point Counter Point (1928; rpt., McLean, IL: Dalkey Archive, 1996), 137, 89. Cunard is also the apparent source of the character Myra Viveash in Huxley’s Antic Hay (1923).


[34] My thanks to Ingrid Diran, who made this observation after reading an earlier version of this article.


[36] Kalliney offers a dissenting gloss on the political meaning of Cunard’s project: “Cunard turns the modernist penchant for exclusivity—the atmosphere of clubby snobbishness frequently on display in white anthologies of the period, which has led to charges of elitism—into a form of critical sympathy. . . . White writers are open to the particular qualities of black literature because it conforms to the models of scarcity and autonomy prevalent in modernist circles: scarce because the black artist overcomes significant obstacles to creative expression, autonomous because black art seems to flourish without external sanction or support” (Commonwealth of Letters, 39–40).

[37] See Marcus, “Bonding and Bondage,” 35.


[40] Quoted in Anne Chisholm, Nancy Cunard (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 192. Winkiel reads the resultant anthology in light of Surrealist ethnography: “The collection provides a materialist history of the present, a collage that depends on the recontextualization and revision of a hidden past in order to construct a new kind of future” (Modernism, Race and Manifestos, 166).


[46] Cunard to McKay, Aug. 8, 1932, James Weldon Johnson Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, MSS 27, box 2, folder 54–57. A direct link between the *Daily Mirror* coverage and the hate mail can be discovered in the headnote to a piece of Cunard’s writing that the *Mirror* excerpted on May 6: “Here is another article by Miss Cunard, written for ‘The Crisis,’ a Harlem magazine, in which she tells of special interest in H. C., a talented Negro composer. Miss Cunard, incidentally, has moved to an all-Negro rooming-house at No. 203 W. 123rd St” (“Nancy Cunard Describes her Interest in Negro Musician,” *Daily Mirror*, May 6, 1932, 3, 6).

[47] See *Negro: An Anthology*, 197–200. Cunard appears to select the letters for shock value, but as Kaplan has pointed out, her archive at the Ransom Center contains letters that are in fact much more explicit and violent than those that were included in the anthology; see *Miss Anne in Harlem*, 285. See also “Heiress in Lawsuit,” *Chicago Defender*, December 24, 1932, 1. It will be useful to consider the way this series of incidents anticipated recent events such as Gamergate, and other mass mediated orchestrations of political reaction.

[48] Gordon provides a survey of press accounts of Cunard’s conference; see *Nancy Cunard*, 162–70.


[50] McKay to Cunard, Aug. 20, 1932, HRC, box 17, folder 1


[54] “About the Sultan and the english (!) sultanness—Yes, do write that if it takes shape as you’d want it” (Cunard to McKay, March 23, 1932, JWJ, MSS 27, box 2, folder 56).


[58] “[W]hen the news was published that the Emperor of Ethiopia had declared that Ethiopia was not a ‘Negro’ state . . . and that the Ethiopians did not consider themselves kin to the Aframericans . . . [t]he news article bore the trademark of one of the reputable news-gathering agencies. It was conspicuously printed in the national newspapers, some giving it the front page” (McKay, Amiable with Big Teeth, 114).


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