

IN SEARCH OF BLACK IDENTITY:
CLAUDE MCKAY'S *HOME TO HARLEM**

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As a forerunner of the Harlem Renaissance, Claude McKay was a spectacular figure in African-American literature. He was one of the first black writers to affirm black consciousness as a useful tool to awaken the oppressed and exploited race to have confidence in its own culture, to search for self identity, and to stand on an equal footing with the other peoples of the world. Throughout his life, he underwent different kinds of experiences--traveling in many European and American cities, mixing with the lower class of black people in every walk of life, and witnessing their suffering and misfortunes. As a writer who first established himself as a poet, he made acquaintances with numerous black writers and artists, but their effeminate and genteel concept of literature was incompatible with his temperament which derived its sources from the life instinct of the black people. McKay's break with the other writers became inevitable, for he persistently affirmed the "organic vitality" of the black in his works (Bremer 50).

Racial consciousness was the source which enabled McKay to capture the collective vitality and instinct of his race, to embody its images in his works, and to finally set up a literature of its own which is true to the life experiences of the race in the western world (Butcher 127). From this perspective, we will first examine McKay's depiction of the images of the black in his novel

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Home to Harlem (1928), then analyze the significance of the black experience in the context of American society, and finally conclude that his effort to present a vignette of the black life and experience helps set up cultural pluralism for American society.

McKay's life itself was full of legendary experiences, ranging from being a waiter in a restaurant in New York City, the first black novelist on the best seller list in African-American literature, the glory of giving a speech to the Fourth Congress of the Third International in Moscow, to his penniless death in a Chicago hospital as a result of his steadfast belief in personal and literary integrity (Larson 66; Collier 347). In 1912 when he immigrated to the United States, the twenty-two-year-old young man was already an established poet back home. Leaving behind him the Jamaican heritage and tradition, he was stranded in a limbo of spiritual crisis and physical predicament in terms of cultural confrontation as well as a hard life in a new land. He abandoned the land where he had grown up, a stance which suggested mental disruption and dislodgement from the past. Yet, he felt alienated in the United States. Presumably he was happy to be a Jamaican; being an American made him uneasy. The anxiety of alienation is a common phenomenon among intellectuals in the twentieth century who became rootless and disenfranchised by the cataclysm of modern society:

I mean by the word [alienation] to speak of a certain attitude having to do with the social position and function of the novelist, an attitude that succeeded another at the beginning of this century, toward the man of letters as Brahmin or at least as genteel, benevolent, wise, composed, and if separate from his society, then separate by reason of being above the battle (Klein *After Alienation* 17).

Emotionally, he was nostalgic for the tropical plants and landscape over there.¹ For instance, his configuration of the

¹ McKay's novels and poetry stand unique in African-American literature on the grounds that they are interspersed with fauna and flora of the West Indies,

image of black women overwhelmingly overshadows that of white women: "Sometimes there were two or three white women who attracted attention because they were white and strange to Harlem, but they appeared like faded carnations among those burning orchids of a tropical race." (McKay *Home to Harlem* 106; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text by the abbreviation *HH*). The canvas on space is also full of that image: "The high staircase built on the outside and pots of begonias and ferns on the landing . . ." (*HH* 152). In essence, alienation becomes a predominant note in most of McKay's works, for his yearning for the land was intense and urgent (Cooper "Claude McKay and the New Negro of the 1920's" 298).

Throughout his career, McKay remained an outsider. His experiences of doing various odd jobs enabled him to have a better understanding of the thought, emotion, and sense of solidarity and brotherhood among black people around the world. But he still had some difficulty in identifying himself whole-heartedly with the life of the drinking bout and cabaret of the working class (Condit 356). Actually, the writer's work experience aboard the Pennsylvania Railway is graphically represented in Chapter ten of the novel entitled "The Railroad" (Gayle 17), in which the incarnation of his physical and mental ideals—Jake and Ray—first come across each other. As a third cook, Jake works "in the hot square hole of a pantry and the coffin-shaped kitchen of the dining-car" (*HH* 123), while Ray is a waiter who takes charge of orders and puts away the dinner set and soiled linens. Unlike the other workers who spend their free time gambling, swearing, and

which consitute and permeate an atmosphere of exoticism as well as primitivistic force. As P.S. Chauhan has said, "Even as [McKay] negotiates the surge and rhythm of the English sentence, his memory drags in the native creatures, populating, in consequence, the metropolitan English narrative with strange birds, beasts, and flowers" (75). Nevertheless, this quality by no means impair his works. Apart from being a romantic poet, he is rather objective and precise in dealing with his subject matters. Geta J. LeSeur has observed: "His best works were not about the New York, Jamaica or American scenes while he was living in these places but when he was away from them" (305).

frolicking, Ray would sit alone to read books ranging from a Sapphic love story by French writer Alphonse Daudet to the history of the Haitian revolution. In one way or another, the portrayal of Ray reveals aspects of McKay's Hamletian disposition: "Indeed, Ray was too easily moved for the world he lived in. The delicate-fibered mechanism of his being responded to sensations that were entirely beyond Jake's comprehension" (*HH* 222).

His attack on the self-complacency of black intellectuals made them wary of him. To be sure, McKay's break with contemporary black intellectuals was largely derived from the discrepancy between the promotionism of his peers and his perception of black reality and consciousness. For some black intellectuals, white approval was indispensable for the development of black culture, especially in the burgeoning stage of the Harlem Renaissance.² As Stephen H. Bronz has pointed out clearly, "Nearly all Negro critics, including W. E. B. DuBois, urged Negro writers to take full advantage of their popularity by describing only edifying aspects of Negro life. And some authors rebelled against this stricture" (14). That McKay was one of the rebels is by no means any coincidence, if we take into account his concept of literature as representation of life as what it is. All of these factors might account for his short-lived affiliation with Communism.

McKay's painful experiences in America, France, and England deepened his recognition of what black people were suffering in a world dominated by the Caucasian. As a physical persona for the novelist, Jake prickly feels the stigma and bitterness of discrimination inflicted on the black during his wartime vagabondage in European cities—Harve, Brest, and London. He

² In addition to this rebelling stance regarding the direction and development of black culture, McKay further estranges himself from his peers by criticizing that the Harlem artists are involved more in competition for the favoritism of the white patronage than in enlightenment of the black people. As Ralph C. Story has argued, "In essence, the Awakening writers were engaged in a battle for ascendancy to a separate and elevated status as *the* black writer most respected by white patrons, critics, editors and publishers" (288).

breathes out what is in McKay's mind about the uneasiness of the black in the presence of the white: "[H]e knew that when a Yankee said 'nigger' he meant hatred for Negroes, whereas when he said 'darker' he meant contempt. He preferred white folks' hatred to their friendly contempt" (HH 5). Furthermore, the havoc and heavy causality of the war as the novelist was witnessing wreaked his mind so much that for a time he despaired of the situation and seemed enchanted by the liberating doctrine of Communism. As he gradually found out the true nature of Communism, he just could not accept its tendency to sacrifice personal dignity to the momentary needs of the Party. Moreover, the idea of class struggle inherent in Communism was apparently at variance with his belief in the freedom of the individual and the artistic vision for a harmonious order of the world, so that he became disillusioned and renounced his Communist membership.³ Poor and miserable as he was at the end of his life, he would have got some needed help had he said something in favor of Communism. But he remained silent on this point. As his life-long, left-wing friend Max Eastman has said,

His last years were passed in sickness; he could not write much; and he was destitute. One word on the communist side would have brought him ease, comfort, contemporary fame and a good income. But he would not speak it. He chose instead to live in penury, and watch his fame and popularity gradually disappear from the earth. A few years more and he would have seen them rise again, for his choice was as correct as it was courageous, and

³ In an analysis of McKay's affiliation with Communism and his subsequent disillusionment, Adam Lively tends to emphasize the historical and political implications of the novelist's decision in the context of Harlem Renaissance (230-34). Interestingly, the other critic has approached the polemic from the perspective of cultural development of the minority ethnic group—whereas W. E. B. DuBois and his colleagues sought the patronage of white bourgeoisie, McKay turned to the Communist Party with the illusion to maintain his independence and integrity within that clique. It turned out to be *ipso facto nil*, though (286-27). See also Conroy 22; Cooper and Reinders 69-71; Klein *Foreigners* 81-83.

his place in the world's literature is unique and is assured (9).

His temperament as an artist was incompatible with the Communist, which is more concerned with the manipulation of political power than with the realization of equality among races. Nevertheless, what never changed was his devotion to and interest in the art of literature. Under these circumstances, it was a corollary that he turned to art as a means to embody his ultimate concern which engaged him in the endeavor for the establishment of a black culture and the quest for the truth of humanity and the divinity of the individual.⁴

Due to his strong commitment to black consciousness, McKay was very much concerned about the culture of the black diaspora. He understood the importance of racial consciousness for the black people, if they wanted to survive in the western world. In order to emancipate themselves from the yoke of slavery and dependence, they would have to pursue their own cultural roots and conventions so as to assert their own identity. But that would be no small job under the domination and hegemony of western culture. The point in question was to keep intact the blackness of the race—the features of physical, vital, and instinctual forces unique to the race.

In the twenties when black culture was taking shape, there was a dispute over the function of art among black intellectuals. W. E. B. DuBois, along with other black intellectuals such as Jessie Fauset, Alain Locke, James Weldon Johnson, and Charles S. Johnson, proposed the promotional aspect of art in which the positive and optimistic images of the black were intended to awaken the race into recognition of the pride of the race (Cooper

⁴ In his analysis of McKay's affirmation of humanistic values and decorum, Condit concludes that the novelist was gradually aware of the fact that following the party line would jeopardize artistic integrity: as an artist, "[i]t was to 'humanity as a whole,' and to personal artistic integrity that McKay pledged his highest allegiance" (356). Despaired of any political cause, McKay converted to Catholicism in 1944. Perhaps he could only find consolation and enduring value in religion and literature. See also Conroy 21-22.

Claude McKay 239; Marian B. McLeod 342-43). As an artist, McKay claimed that he was not only trying to depict the positive values of the race, but also trying to represent a full picture of the life of the race as a whole. To put his theory into literary praxis, he made use of his own experiences as the basis of his subject matter. On the one hand, McKay fondly admired the optimistic nature and spontaneous vitality for life in the black personality. On the other hand, his career as an artist demanded that he observe life with detachment and impartiality. Therefore, he was torn between polar impulses; that is, to embrace the *status quo* of the race or to take up the cause of a rebel.

For McKay, the distinct qualities of the black expressed in psyche, history, and social culture were the ensemble of the primal life energy and instinct for life. The impact of centuries of civilization had vitiated the westerners to the extent that they had lost the vision. In contrast, the black culture was full of the rhythm and impulse of primal life, especially among the people of the lower class with whom McKay was familiar from his encounters with them throughout his life. The kaleidoscopic picture of the black underworld as depicted in the novel was by no means "to cater for that prurient demand on the part of white folk for a portrayal in Negroes of that utter licentiousness which conventional civilization hold white folk back from enjoying" (DuBois 202).⁵

True, McKay's artistic design was far above the denigration of his detractor. He was trying to project ideal images of the black in the characterizations of Jake Brown and Ray. Jake stands for McKay's longing for the physical beauty and energy of life as shown in the cabaret of Harlem, while Ray stands for the intel-

⁵ In his response to DuBois's accusation of lascivious and prurient thoughts in the novel, McKay wrote a bitter rejoinder to the great critic: "Now this is personal and you have been an editor long enough to know that it has nothing to do with criticism. And so I will reply personally to you, Mr. DuBois, by retorting that nowhere in your writings do you reveal any comprehension of esthetics and therefore you are not competent or qualified to pass judgement upon any work of art" ("To W.E. B. DuBois" 150).

lectual aspect of McKay struggling for the acquisition of a knowledge of black consciousness. How to strike a delicate balance between these two forces is an interesting question with regard to the nature of black consciousness and the reality of the black people. On the whole, the portrayal of Jake is more successful than Ray, because he is bold and active enough to love and hate. Incapable of action as a result of inadequate knowledge from his college education, Ray is an intellectual who refuses to identify himself with black culture, so that he has to take flight to Europe at the end of the novel.

The critical reception of the novel was controversial. Some critics acclaimed the splendid verisimilitude of the black underworld which affirms the spontaneous and the primitivistic vitality of the black over the Western cultural value system. The characters seemed to be taken from real life, as indeed they were. "Rough they are, devoid of polish and culture they are, unlovely they are. But men they are, and women they are, not shadows, no imitations, not bogus" (Abbott 14). It became a best seller of the Harlem Renaissance—eleven thousand copies were sold in the first two weeks after publication. But the detractors of the book complained that the explicit description of sex in the novel was indecent and immoral as well. Moreover, it was said that literary work as a means to promote the images of the black and educate the white about the real characters of the black should not depict "the distasteful aspects of Negro life" (Bronz 84). These remarks contained some partial truth about the nature of the novel, but they failed to touch upon the more important intention of McKay's artistic design; that is, to set up a mode of black literary convention in which the true rather than distorted or modified picture of the black is fully represented. As we shall see, his delineation of Jake and Ray as separate models for black experience is valid to the extent that the novelist remained true to his literary ideal as well as to the reality of Harlem life.

Jake Brown is the projection of McKay's ideal image of the black; he embodies black resourcefulness: instinct, optimism, spontaneity, and independence (Chamberlain 5; Bone 69; Giles 78). At the beginning of the novel, he is wandering in various

European cities, but his yearning to go back to his homeland Harlem is so strong and urgent that he is willing to take the arduous work of stoker in a freighter: "It was taking him back home—that was all he cared about" (*HH* 3). Joining the army with the innocent idea to fight against German invaders for the cause of freedom, he is disappointed because even in the army there is discrimination against the black. Instead of going into action, he is relegated to tedious manual work. Thus he decides to desert the army, claiming that he will have nothing to do with the conflict of white economic and political imperialism. As he meditates on his way home:

Why did I want to mix mahself up in a white folks' war? It ain't ever was any of black folks' affair. Niggers am evah always such fools, anyhow. Always thinking they've got something to do with white folks' business (*HH* 7-8).

It should be noted that the war is an incentive to awaken Jake to the reality of racial discrimination. Ironically, instead of fighting against the enemy in the battlefield, he is plunged into life to cope with the no less complicated problem of racism. Henceforth, he makes up his mind to pursue his own identity and the fulfillment of the individual rather than sacrifice for a dubious and remote goal imposed on him by the decree of the Establishment. Symbolically, his voyage from war-wrecked Europe back to Harlem is a reversal of the epic motif: he sails back from Hades into a world full of signs of life, joy, pleasure, love, sound, fury, and quarrel. Self-knowledge is what Jake learns from the war experience, though he also pays a high price for it. Desertion becomes a nightmare in his mind which pesters his subconscious self. His apprehension reflects the fact that the individual is powerless and vulnerable under the control of the collective society, which is invoked by name and imbued with misery, horror, and death.

Jake's life in Harlem incarnates the vitality of black people which "is a song of affirmation, of acceptance of the flesh as natural" (Chamberlain 5; see also Barksdale 340). The following passage vividly depicts the joviality and carnivalism of the lifestyle

of the black—a mixture of rhythm, sensuality, and musicality:

The women, carried away by the sheer rhythm of delight, had risen above their commercial instincts (a common trait of Negroes in emotional states) and abandoned themselves to pure voluptuous jazzing. They were gorgeous animals swaying there through the dance, punctuating it with marks of warm physical excitement. The atmosphere was charged with intensity and over-charged with currents of personal reaction (HH 108).

His love adventure with the brown girl Felice, his drinking orgies, gambling, dope-taking, and many other kinds of Harlem underworld pastimes are limited; nevertheless, he does not indulge himself so completely in carnal pleasure as to lose himself. As a matter of fact, he is not recklessly unrestrained or dissolute; he is temperate in his desiring what the Harlem underworld offers him in some way or another (Giles 78-79; Abbott 14). He is inclined to take life as it is. In this connection, he is more positive than his counterpart Ray, who is simply stalking in the margins of life and finally taking flight to Europe. Jake is by no means a simple-minded person. Let's examine some examples. Being aware of racism inherent in the labor union, he refuses to join the labor strike because he does not want to be a pawn (HH 45-46). He would rather go to work on the railroad than be kept as a "sweetman" by sensuous, seductive Rose (HH 113).

As a projection of the physical McKay, Jake embodies the "rude, boisterous and Nietzschean" libido of life (Chamberlain 5). The strong urge and drive to live to the fullest extent are typical features of the race which enable the black to survive in the most adverse environment. Once getting a relapse on the verge of convalescence, he tells Ray: "Mah laigs got many moh miles to run yet, chasing after the sweet stuff o' life, chappie" (HH 222). From this analysis, it is obvious that Jake is the hero of the novel who is able to enjoy life and who carries his emotional and instinctual life into full play. He represents the values of the race in both physical being and personality:

Negroes are still capable of unstructured emotional behavior, especially when it is appropriate. Not only is that capacity a positive thing in [McKay's] three novels, it is what enables the Afro-American to resist dehumanization by the white power structure (Giles 20-21).

The flight motif is prevalent in Jake's life. Leaving his home to join the army, he travels across the Atlantic to Brest, France, where his company is held. Later on, he deserts the army and leaves for England to sojourn there for a while to wait for the freighter to take him home. He comes back to Harlem as the Armistice is announced. Working as a third cook on the Pennsylvania Railroad, Jake travels to many cities. As he is nostalgic when he is detained in Europe, he feels depressed when the train leaves Harlem (Larson 70). So far it does not mean that he is spatially limited to a small confine in his life. As he becomes mature, he gradually overcomes this weakness. At the end of the novel, he is leaving for Chicago with his beloved Felice to start their life in a new place. Unlike Ray who takes flight to Europe, Jake is mature enough to confront the challenge of a new environment while affirming his identity in the land in which he was born.⁶ In contrast, Ray's escape indicates the qualms and rootlessness of his identity; he still has a long way to go to search for his true self.

If Jake is the physical McKay, then the intellectual incarnation of the novelist is Ray, who shares many similarities with the

⁶ Basing his argument on McKay's status of marginality, P. S. Chauhan has regarded Jake's leaving for Chicago as the result of the protagonist's recurrent sense of uncertainty. Therefore, he is to be on the move (78-80; see also Giles 83). So far as the interpretation of Jake's action is concerned in the context of American literature, it seems more plausible to construe it as the fulfillment of a deferred dream than to depreciate its value as a sign of distress or apprehension, just as Jay Gatsby goes to the West to pursue the American Dream. Moreover, Pyne-Timothy has noted the role of Jack's beloved Felice in his decision: "Her warmth is both physical and spiritual and these are the special qualities which enable Jake ... to anchor himself and to face future with some understanding and sense of purpose" (154).

writer: they both come from prominent families in their homeland [Ray's father was an official in Haiti] (*HH* 138); they left their countries and came to the States after they had grown up; they went to college in America, but dropped out from school (Giles 81; Greenberg 244-45). As intellectuals, they are sensitive to the fact that the black enjoyed more freedom and autonomy in the West Indies than the black in America (Kent 38). As minorities in a white society, they witness the unfair treatment of their people, the bankruptcy of the Western standards and values in World War I, and strong nostalgia for their homeland, but they are unable to do anything about it. Their education equips them with the knowledge to reflect upon their own fate, to pursue happiness, and to hold a dream for a higher value of life, but what they behold in real life is nothing but frustration, anguish, failure, and humiliation. But they have neither the courage and determination to challenge the *status quo* nor the resignation to accept what it is in real life *per se*. Plunged into the impasse of spiritual dilemma, they are simply dreaming of the Edenic island of the past. Consequently they turn out to be misfits in society.

Intellectualism renders Ray incapable of action. As a Hamletian character, he thinks and procrastinates so much that he loses the will to take any action. Pensive is the trait of the man: "[Ray] was of average size, slim, a smooth pure ebony with straight features and a suggestion of whiskers" (*HH* 127). Unlike Jake, he is unable to enjoy life, let alone to appreciate the vital and instinctual forces of the race. Due to the uncertainty of his own identity, he is constantly in an epistemological predicament which, on the one hand, makes him meditate on the meaning of life in abstract terms rather than participate in it, and deprives him of his pride in his own race, on the other. This cynical and negative attitude of his can be seen in the episode of Agatha's love for him. Preoccupied with hatred for his own race, he declines to accept her love:

And Agatha was acting wistfully. He knew what would be inevitable outcome of meeting that subtle wistful yearning half way. Soon he would become one of the contented hogs in the

pigpen of Harlem, getting ready to litter little black piggies He saw destiny working in her large, dream-sad eyes, filling them with the passive softness of resignation to life, and seeking to encompass and yoke him down as just one of the thousand niggers of Harlem. And he hated Agatha and, for escape, wrapped himself darkly in self-love (*HH* 263-64).

As one of the sacred and enduring values in human society, love, by implication, has its own sanctity in defining human relationships (Van Doren 351). It is a travesty to simply dismiss it as a rank and debasing passion. That Ray denies love does not mean that love is of no avail to the life of the individual, in the final analysis. Rather, the question lies more in Ray himself than in any other factors. Instead of taking pride in his own race, he seems to despise his origin, which is innately destined. It is ethically inadequate to call his compatriots "contented hogs" or "niggers of Harlem." Charles R. Larson has remarked: "[B]ooks and education (in part at Howard University) have corrupted his free spirit. He is also McKay's portrait of the educated Negro who can find no job comparable to his ability and interests" (68). Like Voltaire's philosopher in *Candide* going back to cultivate his own garden which symbolizes the protagonist's coming to terms with nature as a result of enlightened wisdom and a peaceful mind, we might reason out this point to its logic extreme to the effect that Ray's quest for self identity neither lies in books nor the journey abroad; rather it should be defined in the context of American society, so to speak. As Nathan Irvin Huggins put it so correctly:

Abandoning all distinction was a total rejection of the past, a kind of self-obliteration. Those qualities of American life which had germinated in black soil had to be explained. The spiritual, the music, the dance, the language, were distinct because they were from a Negro source. Without distinct Negro character, there would be no Negro genius (151).

Yet McKay does not reject intellect completely; he just opposes the over-wrought intellectualism which incapacitates rather than enriches the life of the individual. McKay acclaims Ray's

effort to acquaint Jake with the glory of the great black revolutionary Toussaint L'ouverture. It is true that Jake comes to have black consciousness and take pride in the race through Ray's reiteration of the great heritage of the black people, which is otherwise unknown to him:

Jake was very American in spirit and shared a little of that comfortable Yankee contempt for poor foreigners. And as an American Negro he looked askew at foreign niggers. Africa was jungle, and Africans bush niggers, cannibals. And West Indians were monkey-chasers. But now he felt like a boy who stands with the map of the world in colors before him, and feels the wonder of the world (*HH* 134).

Taken together, they are complementary to each other to the effect that neither of them is sufficient to be the ideal image of the black (Dorris 60-61). We can infer that the ideal image of the black is a combination of head and heart; that is, Ray's intellect and Jake's primal vitality and resource for life. At the end of the novel, Ray decides to leave for Europe in search of the cause of corruption in western culture, whereas Jake and his beloved Felice are going to start their new life in Chicago. On the whole, it is a gesture indicative of the triumph of the healthy and positive attitude of life over the vitiated intellectualism on the part of the race.⁷ Vital forces and instinct tempered with intellect and knowledge are the ideal image of the black in McKay's mind, as has been discussed in this study.

To sum up, McKay's achievement in African-American literature is his arduous and faithful search for a black aesthetic which can give vent to the voice of the black people as well as contribute cultural pluralism to the repertoire of American literature. As an

⁷ So far as the characterization of the novel is concerned, the portrayal of Ray is far less lifelike and impressive than that of Jack. In a sense, McKay's sympathy seems to lie in the latter than the former. As John R. Chamberlain has stated that Ray "is a tragic figure because he has become imbued with the alien white man's values; but Ray is simply an undertone in a happy novel" (2). See also Abbott 14; Giles 81-82.

artist, McKay was acutely alert to the alienation, oppression, suffering, and injustice the black suffered in American society; he devoted himself to the exploration of the dignity and divinity of the individual in his works (McKay "To James Ivy" 145; see also Tolson 289). His concept of literature as a mirror held to nature was totally different from that of the black intellectuals who tended to regard literary art as a tool to promote the status of the black. This is the point of departure between them which caused no small antagonism between the parties concerned. Although DuBois intended black artists "to portray their race selectively, in idealised locales, employments, and situation," McKay insisted on his role as a historical witness who sticks fast to the truth rather than pander to serve any cause (A. L. McLeod 67). He once stated his concept of literature as follows:

American Negroes have been living their lives behind close shutters . . . not allowing the light in for fear of cracker insults and mud. For the sake of artistic self-expression the light should be let in. I am never afraid of light. I have sun and truth as I see it ("To Arthur A. Schomburg" 142).

For the most part, he was right in maintaining his principle, literally and ideologically. He thus gave us a rich legacy of the awakening of black consciousness and the ideal image of the race in the organic embodiedness of Jake and Ray. True, they are both memorable black heroes in African-American literature. It is therefore apt to say that *Home to Harlem* is an important milestone in the history of the Harlem Renaissance which records the reality of black experiences in the twenties when a new black culture was in the making.

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追尋黑人身分認同： 柯洛德·馬偕的《重回哈林》

紀元文

摘要

在美國二十年代初興起的哈林文藝復興運動中，柯洛德·馬偕係一位倍受爭議的先驅作家。他二十二歲自牙買加移居美國，親身經歷過社會底層黑人所遭遇到的壓迫、剝削，和凌辱。後來他旅居歐洲，廣泛接觸各有色人種，進而體會他們的生活、觀念、與情感。他主張以黑人意識激發被壓迫的族群，以對抗白人的社會成制，認為這是黑人族群賴以圖存的不二法門。本文旨在分析馬偕所著《重回哈林》（*Home to Harlem*，一九二八年）一書，書中馬偕藉著傑克（Jake）與瑞（Ray）這兩個角色，刻劃出理想的黑人形象，乃是心靈與肉體合而為一。

《重回哈林》的主角傑克和瑞代表兩種不同類型的人物。傑克具有典型的黑人特質，充滿原始的活力：直覺、樂觀、感情奔放。歐戰期間，傑克流浪於英、法諸地，一心想重回哈林的家園；待他回到哈林後，重睹故舊景物，才覺得適意。他在火車的餐車上當二廚，結識當服務生的瑞，受其影響頗鉅；後來傑克決定跟女友費麗

絲 (Felice) 前往芝加哥，開拓新生遠景。瑞是來自海地的移民，曾經上過大學，他有知識分子的敏感與睿智，瞭解黑人獨特的文化傳統、價值觀念和與生俱來的原始活力。他深知黑人在西方世界飽受苦難的癥結，卻因無力改變現狀而頗感沮喪；在現實生活上，瑞不敢接受雅嘉莎 (Agatha) 的真情摯愛。相形之下，他對生命的態度，不像傑克那麼肯定與積極。最後他祇得遠走歐洲，繼續探究歐洲文明墮落的原因。

質言之，馬偕在黑人文學上的貢獻，在他一生孜孜矻矻探究黑人美學，並且形諸於文學創作，翔實刻劃黑人生命的真相，冀能透過瞭解文化根源與傳統，以肯定自己的身分認同。這是他與極力主張改良主義的黑人知識分子，例如杜波思 (W. E. B. DuBois) 、詹孫 (James Weldon Johnson) 等人，最大的歧異之處。