Losing LeninInst Internationalism in Claude McKay's Lost Novel

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There exists a rich diversity of texts about historically significant collaborations and entanglements between Russia and Black Americans. In his "lost" novel, *Amiable with Big Teeth,* completed in the early 1940s but posthumously published in 2017,[1] Claude McKay explores themes that foreshadow some of this existing scholarship; however, I argue that the novel breaks new ground in several ways. First, it creatively and uniquely explores how tensions in the 1930s between Soviet Russia and Black nationalists affected, and transformed, everyday life in Harlem, New York City. Most importantly, although the novel is set during a period of optimism about transnational projects like Pan Africanism, its literary assessment of LeninInst Internationalism reveals some skepticism about the durability of transnational collaborations and echoes a familiar rhetorical skepticism in contemporary discourse about hegemonic notions of Black American identity. Before unpacking these arguments, it is necessary to contextualize the concept of LeninInst Internationalism.

On October 25, 1917,[2] an insurrectionary Marxist faction called the Bolsheviks, led by revolutionary politician Vladimir Lenin, took control of Russia and solidified the cessation of the Russian Empire by dissolving the provisional government that was put in place after the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II.[3] The Bolsheviks, under Lenin's leadership, sought to revitalize Communism by promoting the egalitarian principle of collectivism, the idea that "the interests of the class as a whole were prior to and higher than those of individuals, or groups, within that class."[4] This new socialist polity that embraced the "laboring, exploited classes" and chastised "non-laboring, bourgeois elements" weakened the notion of a citizenship tied to territorial nationality.[5] As a result, "[i]n the Soviet state, no sharp distinction would exist between foreigners and citizens. Rather, the line to be drawn separated people of bourgeois origin from the working classes."[6]

There were, of course, noticeable discrepancies between the resoluteness of this collectivist theory and the reality of its implementation. Foreigners in Soviet Russia, for example, were often still regarded as second-class citizens.[7] Despite these implementation shortcomings, the borderless citizenry of collectivist philosophy was proudly touted as the ideological underpinning of Soviet identity.[8] Working towards a common working-class goal only seemed achievable, at least in theory, if equal rights were guaranteed to everyone in the collective. Hence, in order to neutralize variables capable of dismantling the notion of a collectivist working-class identity, Lenin made gender and racial equality an integral component of the Soviet constitution: The first Soviet Constitution of 1918 proclaimed in Article 22 the equality of all citizens in the Soviet Republic—regardless of sex, race, nationality—and established in Article 64 the right of women to elect or be elected to the Soviets on an equal footing with men.[9] Lenin hoped that his Great October Revolution of 1917 would ignite a "worldwide Communist insurgency," an international proletarian movement that would inspire the global working class in colonized and capitalist regions to revolt against their imperialist overlords and establish collectivist communities.[10] In order to facilitate the actualization of this Internationalist dream, Lenin enlisted his Bolshevik comrade, Leon Trotsky, to outline a manifesto for the Third Communist International, commonly known as Comintern.[11]

Comintern was officially established in March 1919, and its overarching goal was "to provide a forum for the discussion of Communist ideology, as well as a disciplined and centralized leadership for … the cataclysmic destruction of world capitalism."[12] During this period, Lenin was arguably best known for his rhetoric on imperialism, a consumptionist model he predicted "showed the inevitable trends towards a world war implicit in the increased worldwide competition between colonial powers."[13] At the turn of the twentieth century, the United States of America,[14] then an emergent capitalist superpower, was on Lenin's radar. He believed a flourishing proletariat consciousness among the marginalized Black American populace was the catalyst needed to inspire America's Communist revolution.[15] Deliberate efforts were thus made by the Soviets to reconceptualize Black American identity as part of an Internationalist proletariat consciousness.

Posters from the 1920s with images and slogans depicting Comintern liberating Black people from capitalist oppression[16] would have naturally appealed to the marginalized Black American populace. Other significant efforts included courting prominent Black intellectuals. In 1922, the Kremlin invited Jamaican-born and American-based writer Claude McKay as an unofficial guest, during the Fifth Anniversary of the Russian Revolution and the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, to address the "Negro Question."[17] Describing his time in Soviet Russia in his essay "Soviet Russia and the Negro," McKay said:

> I was a poet, that was all, and their keen questions showed that they were much more interested in the technique of my

> poetry, my views on and my position regarding the modern literary movements than in the difference of my color. …Those Russian days remain the most memorable of my life.[18]

McKay goes on to argue that unlike Americans and Western Europeans with anti-Black attitudes, the Soviet Russians he encountered, from the educated classes to the common workers, considered him a legitimate member "of the world of humanity."[19] Although it is possible to label McKay's claims as cleverly curated propaganda, with some scholars pointing to contradictory accounts by other Black visitors who "derided the Soviet Union and insisted that life there was inferior to American life, even for the Negro,"[20] McKay's observations remain poignantly relevant for several reasons. Not only are his observations about anti-Blackness corroborated by African Americans who lived in or visited Soviet Russia during the same period,[21] but they also demonstrate how Soviet Russia successfully courted the support of African American intellectuals. The antiracist rhetoric of Lenin's Internationalist Soviet ideology predictably charmed Black writers and entertainers who were "frustrated with the limitations of racist United States."[22] And Soviet Russia's "promise of a better society" inevitably transformed these Black sojourners into Communist sympathizers who championed the egalitarian principles of Leninist Internationalism.[23]

Two years after McKay addressed the Kremlin, Lenin died (1924) and Joseph Stalin assumed power. Adolf Hitler was accruing political power in Germany and he openly threatened to obliterate Soviet Russia and Communism.[24] Stalin's decision to safeguard Soviet Russia's territorial and ideological sovereignty meant he often contravened the Internationalist principles of LeninInst discourse. For example, Russia's strategic arms alliance with Italy was announced as an effort to militarily thwart Nazi aggression.[25] However, the continuation of the Italo-Soviet partnership after Italy's occupation of Ethiopia, a sovereign Black African nation,[26] implied that Soviet Russia was now backing an imperialist nation whose colonial ambitions in Africa directly contradicted the antiracist rhetoric of Soviet collectivism.

In his posthumously published *Amiable with Big Teeth* (2017), McKay explores the growing disjunct between Soviet Russia and Black nationalists in Harlem, who characterized the Italo-Soviet partnership as an act of betrayal. Although historical works like Mark Naison's *Communists in Harlem During the Great Depression* and Cheryl Lynn Greenberg's *"Or Does it Explode?" Black Harlem in the Great Depression* also explore similar tensions between Black Harlem and the Communist Party,[27] McKay's lost novel offers a distinct literary representation of these events. As literary scholar Allan H. Pasco points out, literary texts are less concerned with authentically describing or replicating history and more interested in responding "to reality, whether by reflection or reaction."[28] Thus, the ability of literary fiction to imaginatively reflect and/or react to the hopes and anxieties of specific time periods allows readers to experience historical events from refreshingly different perspectives. While the themes in *Amiable*

with Big Teeth are not necessarily novel, their artistic treatment of transnational politics inimitably exposes both the strengths and fragility of transnational collaborations by (re)imagining how the loss of LeninInst Internationalism transformed the racial and political identities of ordinary people in Black Harlem. In other words, McKay's novel creatively uses everyday interactions between families, businessmen, schoolteachers, academics, diplomats, and grassroots organizations to symbolize the arduous, and sometimes impossible, task of implementing an Internationalist agenda in a regional setting with its own unique concerns.

Amiable with Big Teeth is admittedly a muddled literary text, often succumbing to the weight of its complex cast of international characters, overwrought writing, and didactic political sermons. And because scholarly works like Nadia Nurhussein's *Black Land: Imperial Ethiopianism and African America* have explored similar themes,[29] such as how African Americans historically engaged with imperial imaginaries of Ethiopian identity and culture, the ideas in McKay's lost novel are not particularly groundbreaking to contemporary academics. These reasons might explain why the novel has received little scholarly attention to this point. However, Russian literature and culture scholar Jennifer Wilson makes a case for the novel's artistic merit and historical relevance by pointing out that it was written during a post-Harlem Renaissance era when "most scholars thought that Black cultural production had come to a grinding halt as a result of the Great Depression (and the consequent dip in arts patronage)."[30] Despite the absence of avenues to showcase their writings during the economically turbulent period of the early twentieth century, the discovery of McKay's lost novel is proof that Harlem Renaissance writers continued to produce works which reflected and reacted to the discourses of their times. My article also makes a case for the novel's scholarly vitality by arguing that although *Amiable with Big Teeth* explores familiar themes, it offers a unique literary point of view by using the triumphs and idiosyncrasies of everyday people in Black Harlem to commend and critique the Internationalist promise of a thriving transnational coexistence.

McKay's lost novel opens with the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 by the fascist Italian dictator, Benito Mussolini. Two principal factors motivated Mussolini's decision to invade Ethiopia: restoring the Roman Empire's former glory by acquiring colonial territory and avenging Italy's humiliating defeat at the Battle of Adowa.[31] In 1896, during the apex of European imperialism in Africa, strong-willed Ethiopian fighters led by Emperor Menelik II asserted their sovereignty by defeating Italian troops at the Battle of Adowa.[32] The defeat humiliated Italy on the world stage and "Mussolini in fact used the memory of the battle of Adowa as a rallying point for a fresh attempt at conquering Ethiopia" in 1935.[33] Mussolini's troops initially suffered setbacks but after adopting a more lethal military strategy (tanks, poison gas, and terror bombings), they easily dominated Ethiopia's rustic and ill-equipped army.[34]

The League of Nations, an intergovernmental organization created after the First World War to ensure world peace, condemned Italy's aggression but only imposed "halfhearted" sanctions that did not include coal, oil, and steel.[35] Unscathed by

ineffective sanctions, Italian forces pressed on and seized control of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital, in 1936. Four days after the fall of Addis Ababa, Italy officially annexed Ethiopia, and the African nation joined Eritrea and Italian Somaliland as part of Italian East Africa.[36] Mussolini's lofty dream of a colonial empire was short-lived. In 1941, when Italian troops in East Africa fell to the British, the British Empire subsumed Eritrea and Somaliland, and Ethiopia's sovereignty was reinstated.[37]

Back in the mid-1930s, news about Mussolini's imminent conquest of Ethiopia made Black America uneasy. For marginalized African Americans still without access to the civil liberties of legitimate citizenship, Ethiopia's sovereignty represented an optimistic symbol of Black resistance.[38] The unprecedented defeat of Italy at Adowa, "which had secured Ethiopia's independence while the rest of Africa fell under the rule of European powers, had forced the Western world to accord Ethiopia the status and privileges of an independent country."[39] There was also a religious dimension. America's Black Christian community, even as early as the 1930s, was firmly established and had an influential control over the everyday happenings of Black life.[40] Because the King James Bible translation often used "Ethiopia" as a blanket reference to Africa, the Black church saw Ethiopia as a sacred land, a representation of their Black presence in God's anointed scriptures.[41]

Not only is Blackness, personified by Ethiopia, referenced in the Bible, according to James H. Meriwether, it is highly favored: "Psalm 68, a psalm of David that centers on God punishing the wicked while the righteous rejoice and sing praises, reads in part: 'Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God.'"[42] For Black Christians, the survival of Ethiopia represented the hope of God's favor and his promise to punish their wicked oppressors.[43] Thus, the prospect of Ethiopia falling into the hands of a fascist imperialist caused a great deal of discomfort within the African American community. The Internationalist ramifications of this multilayered bond between Black Americans and Ethiopia is the philosophical core of McKay's *Amiable with Big Teeth*.

The novel's first chapter borrows its title from Psalm 68: "**ETHIOPIA SHALL STRETCH OUT HER HANDS TO GOD**."[44] The Italian invasion is already in progress and the Hands to Ethiopia, a charity based in Harlem and led by Black Americans, is raising funds to fortify Ethiopian soldiers with the modern weaponry needed to effectively combat Mussolini's unrelenting troops. The Ethiopian Emperor, Haile Selassie, is apparently pleased with their display of solidarity and in order to help bolster their fund-raising efforts, he sends a young envoy, Lij Tekla Alamaya, to Harlem (3). A pulsating Harlem greets the envoy during an elaborate procession organized by the Hands to Ethiopia: "From 110th to 140th Street … Streamers were thrown at marches and confetti fluttered in the air like colored moths" (3). As the procession enters a church, an even more thunderous roar explodes behind them. The crowd is reacting to a lone automobile hoisting a majestic man, gaudily garlanded in exotic tribal uniform and "arabesques" garb (4). Pleased with his reception, he throws the excited audience into an even more frenzied state by unsheathing his sword and brandishing "it at

heaven" (4). He eventually makes his way into the church and introduces himself to the enthralled audience as "Professor Koazhy" (5). Pablo Peixota, the chairman of the Hands to Ethiopia, is unsettled because Professor Koazhy, who is not an official part of the event, is stealing the spotlight.

Tekla, the young envoy, begins his address to the church by thanking the Black American community for their "sympathy and help" and reminding them that despite the valor of the Ethiopian army, "they were fighting a modern war without modern arms" (7). He strategically mentions that the ancient tradition of the Ethiopian faith belongs to "the same Christian faith of Aframericans" before pleading for an increase in contributions to the Ethiopian cause, "for the enemy is strong and cunning" (8). Tekla receives a satisfactory ovation, but the crowd is not content. They want Professor Koazhy. They chant his name repeatedly, and Pablo now feels compelled to officially present the decorated Professor to the audience.

When Professor Koazhy is called up to the stage, his proud steps are met with "wild plaudits" (8). After clicking his heels and saluting Tekla, he unleashes a sprawling harangue about the noble qualities of African history and the historical breadth of Ethiopian civilization: "The dynasty of Ethiopia is older than Solomon … older than the Bible" (9). The congregation is now completely entranced, and Professor Koazhy seizes this opportunity to strongly demand more donations for Ethiopia (11). The fund-raising event is a success, and later that evening, during a dinner party at Pablo's home attended by his friends and colleagues, the novel's Internationalist discourse begins to unravel.

While tensely discussing Soviet Russia's reaction to Mussolini's unlawful invasion of Ethiopia, the matter of white exclusion is mentioned. There had been a considerate push by some prominent persons in the Harlem community to welcome into the group a white representative from the White Friends of Ethiopia, a white-led organization consolidating similar solidarity efforts for the occupied East African nation. Most members of the Hands to Ethiopia, however, are against this suggestion (19). Newton Castle, a schoolteacher, calls this opposition "purely black chauvinism and isolationism" (19) and argues, "No people can stand alone today" (19). Pablo disagrees with Newton, arguing that "the common people feel that Ethiopia was betrayed by the white nations … And you've got to respect their feelings. It is unfair to say their stand is chauvinism. Ethiopia is fighting alone and I'm sure you'll get a lot more out of an all-colored organization" (19). Tekla, the Ethiopian envoy, shares the same sentiment. He reminds the room that although the League of Nations imposed sanctions on Italy, the nation is still "importing all the essential things she needs" (19). Newton remains unpersuaded and points to Soviet Russia's defense of "Ethiopia in the League of Nations, she insisted on sanctions" (19). Dorsey Flagg, a revered academic, interjects and accuses Soviet Russia of hypocrisy: "Russia is selling more war goods to Italy than any nation … Deeds speak better than words … and the deeds of Soviet Russia make a mockery of her words" (19).

A now enraged Newton says he will challenge any insubordinate Trotskyite, a derogatory term used to describe the dissident followers of Leon Trotsky, "who tries to slander Soviet Russia … I have the facts" (20). Trotsky, as mentioned in the introduction, was the trusted ally and confidante of Lenin who outlined the inaugural manifesto of Comintern.[45] After Lenin's death, Trotsky resisted the political rise of Stalin due to ideological differences.[46] In 1924, Stalin introduced the "socialism in one country" idea, an initiative that redirected his priorities from world revolution to national affairs.[47] Its overarching argument was that Soviet Russia had the ability to actualize its socialist goals without relying on a proletariat network elsewhere in this world.[48] This regional emphasis arguably undermined the ambitious transnational objectives of Leninist Internationalism and angered Lenin loyalists like Trotsky, who was exiled from the Soviet Union in 1929 and assassinated in Mexico eleven years later.[49]

The dinner party at Pablo's home is a significant literary device because it symbolizes the contrasting nature of the African American response to Communism. As I earlier stated, Soviet Russia used its antiracist rhetoric to successfully woo Black intellectuals in the 1920s. The success of this strategy continued into the next decade. For example, in a 1936 address titled "The Negro Faces Fascism," delivered at the Third United States Congress Against War and Fascism, acclaimed African American poet and writer Langston Hughes advocated for using the egalitarian political approaches of Communism to end racial marginalization.[50] However, Soviet Russia's success with courting Black intellectuals did not translate into a significant increase in Black membership in the American Communist Party. In the 1920s, there were several reports by high-ranking Communist officials complaining about the "slow headway in trying to recruit blacks"[51] and in African American writer Zora Neale Hurston's defiant 1951 essay, "Why the Negro Won't Buy Communism," she argues that "the American Negro is too smart" to fall for Stalin's deception.[52] The tension between Stalin sympathizers and Stalin skeptics in *Amiable with Big Teeth* thus reflects the rhetorical tension in the African American response to Communism.

For the sake of well-rounded discussion, it is imperative to underline that McKay's lost novel does not nuance Stalin's reaction to Ethiopia's occupation. The novel only focuses on Soviet Russia's hypocritical practice of condemning Mussolini's imperial ambitions while continuing business relations with Italy and does not explore the larger existential issues Stalin had to confront. In the 1930s, Soviet Russia's survival as a nation was at stake. After Adolf Hitler became the chancellor of Germany in 1933, invading Soviet Russia and looming as a threat.[53] In May 1935, five months before Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia, Stalin remarked, "[e]ven when Hitler spoke about peace, he could not 'avoid making threats.'"[54] War with Germany seemed inevitable. This sentiment perhaps was used by Stalin to enter into, and sustain, the Italo-Soviet Pact with Italy in 1933. In addition to sharing the same enemies (the "demo-plutocracies" of France and Great Britain), Soviet Russia and Italy also shared trade interests.[55] The Italo-Soviet Pact formalized a mutually beneficial exchange: Stalin

received a steady supply of ships and planes from Italy and in exchange, he provided Italy with enough oil supplies to cover one-third of the nation's fuel requirements.[56] With the militarily formidable Nazi Germany threatening invasion, Stalin's prioritization of national defense, the acquisition of ships and planes, nuances his reaction to Mussolini's occupation of Ethiopia.

Contrary to accusations in *Amiable with Big Teeth*, regional profits did not primarily motivate Stalin's decision to maintain trade relations with Italy after the occupation of Ethiopia. His main motivation, one can persuasively argue, was not only protecting the territorial sovereignty of Soviet Russia but also ensuring the ideological survival of Communism. Without reliable ships and planes from Italy to defend Soviet borders, Nazi Germany's forces would have easily overpowered Stalin's troops and the collapse of Soviet Russia (the ideological capital of global Communism) would have had dire consequences for Communists in all corners of the world. While Stalin sympathized with Ethiopia's loss of sovereignty (as *Amiable with Big Teeth* notes, Soviet Russia did publicly condemn Mussolini's invasion at the League of Nations), safeguarding the self-determination and ideological survival of Communism required continuous trade relations with Italy. In brief, Stalin arguably had no choice but to play the conflicting role of ally (condemning Mussolini's invasion) and aggressor (providing the oil Mussolini's troops needed to power their mechanized artillery on the battlefield).

It is also important to underscore that Stalin was a staunch advocate for Internationalist projects like the Popular Front policy. Formulated during Comintern's seventh and final World Congress in 1935, the ambitious Popular Front policy was created to encourage the global proliferation of Communism, and it secured some early victories in countries like France, "where the Communists supported the cabinet of socialists and radicals headed by Leon Blum for a year and a half."[57] Additionally, historian Peter S. H. Tang credits China's Communist victory in 1949 to the close and strategic relationship between Stalin and Mao Tse-Tung (375). In America, Communist propagandist efforts were modified to appeal to the democratic sensibilities of American culture. Collective rights discourse was thus discarded in favor of a rhetoric about "antifascist unity, democratic reform, and liberation for oppressed minorities"[58] and during the entire period Stalin was in power, Black Communist sympathizers like renowned singer Paul Robeson still enjoyed greater creative agency in Soviet Russia than in America. Not only was Robeson adored by Russians (the American newspaper *Evening Star* once infamously branded him as the "Russia-loving Negro baritone"),[59] but Soviet movie directors like Sergei Eisenstein also regularly expressed interest in working with him.[60] One can therefore argue that by assisting and engaging with Communists in countries like France, China and America, Stalin preserved core aspects of Lenin's Internationalist legacy.

I must emphasize here that my discussion of these counterarguments is not an attempt to discredit *Amiable with Big Teeth*'s anti-Communist discourse. Although Stalin had a complex set of reasons for supporting Italy, the fact remains that Soviet

Russia was indirectly backing a fascist dictator's invasion and eventual occupation of a sovereign Black nation. Hence, Stalin's support for Italy's invasion of Ethiopia meant that the Black intelligentsia could no longer believe in Communism's promise of an egalitarian world. Similarly put, for Black intellectuals, Stalin's foreign policy in East Africa was a repudiation of Lenin's antiracist Internationalist ideology. By contextualizing both perspectives (Stalin's support for Italy and the Black intelligentsia's rejection of Communism), my article underscores and nuances the fragile nature of transnational partnerships. Although members of a multicultural Communist coalition might share the same core principles, their racial, ethnic, and national differences often provoke an unresolvable conflict of priorities.

Also worthy of emphasis is the fact that *Amiable with Big Teeth* does not solely anchor its critique of Soviet Russia in the self-serving economics of the Italo-Soviet Pact. The novel views Stalin's alliance with fascist Italy as a reflection of Stalin's own fascist inclinations. A document by the Executive Committee of Comintern (ECCI) reads: "Anyone who sides with Trotsky and undertakes to defend Trotskyists becomes an ally of the darkest forces of reaction, an assistant to Fascism and its doings aimed against freedom, against peace and the independence of all the peoples."[61] Stalin, the novel stresses, cannot claim to uphold the antifascist values of Internationalism when he is actively persecuting and assassinating sympathizers of Leninist Internationalism like Trotsky (19–20).

This understanding of Stalin as a ruthless despot dates as far back as the mid-1920s. It has been argued that from 1925 to 1930, Comintern, an organization that under Lenin's leadership had fostered a sense of unity among Communists around the globe, transitioned into "a tool Stalin used to discipline foreign Communist parties in the pursuit of Soviet interests."[62] While visiting Moscow in 1928, renowned Chinese communist Zhang Guotao remarked that Comintern "was no longer 'the general headquarters for the world revolution' but had become 'Stalin's plaything for bullying the Communists of various nations.'"[63] There is also documented and credible evidence of Stalin using ruthless purges to persecute national minorities and dissidents.[64] Historians tend to describe his political leadership, often dubbed Stalinism, as a personality cult that gave him "more power than the Romanov czars had."[65] Stalin's authoritarianism, McKay's novel argues, is ultimately what led to the demise of Lenin's Internationalist principles.

Lenin, it is pertinent to point out, was not consistent with his implementation of Leninist Internationalism. An example is the aforementioned discrimination against Communist foreigners in Soviet Russia despite the borderless notion of Soviet citizenship.[66] Lenin nevertheless aggressively framed, or rather, reframed, his political leadership as an effort to ensure the global collective rights of laboring, exploited classes.[67] Hence, to the foreign spectator, Lenin's political actions were aligned with his Internationalist ideology of antifascism, anti-imperialism, and world revolution. With Stalin, the discrepancy between political action and Internationalist ideology was more glaring. As I previously acknowledged, there is indisputable evidence of Stalin

using purges to persecute national minorities and eliminate his political rivals.[68] Russian historian Yuri Glazov labelled Stalin's political reign as "the black pages of … purges and terror,"[69] and according to literary scholar Joy Gleason Carew, McKay's biographer, Wayne Cooper, "noted that McKay recanted his support of the Soviet Experiment in the 1940s with his growing dismay over Stalinism."[70] For McKay's novel, the ruthlessness of Stalinism undermined Internationalist principles of antifascism and egalitarianism. Thus, claims by Stalin's government of upholding the values of Leninist Internationalism were disingenuous.

In *Amiable with Big Teeth*, the character Maxim Tasan personifies the ruthlessness and disingenuity of Stalinism. Maxim, a prominent figure in the Harlem scene, is a man of mysterious origins. Some believe he is a Russian agent for Stalin and others speculate that he is an agent-at-large for Comintern (90). His ability to operate in Harlem without raising any overwhelming suspicion allows him to infiltrate various Black-led organizations and after successfully portraying himself as a trustworthy ally, he uses his craftily acquired influence to exterminate anti-Stalin sentiments (60). Dorsey, for example, is an influential academic in Black Harlem, and his anti-Stalin rhetoric poses a grave threat to the proliferation of Stalinite dogma. In order to neutralize Dorsey's influence, Maxim recruits Newton, a man of "malleable material," capable of being dominated, disciplined and ultimately manipulated (88). Maxim uses Newton as "an instrument" (89) to disrupt the Hands to Ethiopia by consistently and aggressively branding Dorsey as a fascist sympathizer. These efforts pay off because the Hands to Ethiopia's reputation becomes compromised due to its association with alleged fascists like Dorsey (96).

Maxim also uses blackmail to secure the allegiance of Tekla, the envoy from Ethiopia. He publishes an article in the *Labor Herald*, a Soviet publication circulated in Harlem, questioning the authenticity of Tekla's identity and insinuating he might be a fraud among a group pretending "to be personal representatives of Emperor Haile Selassie … There is evidence that some of these fakers are tools of the Fascists" (107). These reports also damage the reputation of the Hands to Ethiopia because its members had proudly touted Tekla as a legitimate representative of the Ethiopian Emperor. To avert the publication of more damning articles, Tekla begrudgingly becomes an agent for Maxim and severs ties with the Hands to Ethiopia (127). After securing the allegiance of Tekla, Maxim makes a bold final push to completely annihilate the Hands to Ethiopia.

Pablo, the organization's Chairman, began his career in racketeering. After parting ways with the dubious trade, he poured his profits in the real estate business, rose up the ranks and became one of the most influential Black men in Harlem (22). Pablo is now a member of The Good Old Pals, a fraternity of old friends who meet regularly to socialize and celebrate the durability of their camaraderie (153). Exploiting awareness of his racketeering past, Maxim convinces the police that Pablo and his fraternity are involved in illegal gambling activities and when the zealous police officers raid a harmless The Good Old Pals meeting, "armed with hatchets, intent upon

chopping up the roulette wheel which they imagined to be there" (154), they find no proof of gambling. Disappointed, they decide to insolently "bundle all into a patrol wagon" and take them to the police station (154).

The city newspapers, as expected, magnify the details of the arrest with sensationalized reports about the bust of a Harlem gambling club and Pablo's involvement as a "leading promoter of the numbers game" (154). The Communist-run *Labor Herald*, also as expected, went a step further by putting Pablo's photograph on the front page and labelling him "a gangster and racketeer and the most vicious exploiter speculating upon the vices of the unfortunate people of Harlem" (154). Although Pablo and his friends are later cleared of any wrongdoing by a magistrate, "there was no report of the outcome of the trial in the city newspapers" (154). With his integrity now in jeopardy, Pablo resigns as Chairman of the Hands to Ethiopia because "it would hurt the organization if I didn't resign" (155).

With the credibility of its Ethiopian envoy in question, its chairman ousted, and one of its most prominent members accused of being a fascist sympathizer, the Hands to Ethiopia, a sovereign Black charity, is now on the brink of annihilation. This recurrent theme of the loss of Black sovereignty underlines and symbolizes the fragility of transnational political projects. The Soviet Experiment, McKay's lost novel contends, consistently prioritizes other interests over the necessity for Black sovereignty. This explains why Maxim prioritized suppressing anti-Stalin rhetoric over the sovereignty of the Hands to Ethiopia. The way forward for Black nationalists, *Amiable with Big Teeth* proposes, is abandoning the pretense of Leninist Internationalism in the post-Lenin era and focusing on a Pan-Africanist alliance, which prioritizes and safeguards Black sovereignty.

Pan-Africanism first emerged in America in the late nineteenth century as a "political current advocating the unity of all those of African heritage in order to advance the common interests of Africa and all Africans."[71] The optimism of this transnational political movement is represented in *Amiable with Big Teeth* by The Hands to Ethiopia's humanitarian efforts to prevent the colonial occupation of sovereign Ethiopia. Unlike The League of Nations, Soviet Russia, America and other white-led institutions and nations, Black sovereignty is Pan-Africanism's foremost objective. Thus, for the Hands to Ethiopia, safeguarding the territorial and ideological sovereignty of Ethiopia is more important than addressing Hitler's potential invasion of Soviet Russia. However, the enforcement of this Pan-Africanist agenda poses its own unique set of complicated Internationalist challenges.

Going back to the start of the novel, after Professor Koazhy, the overzealous Afrocentric academic, upstages Tekla at the fundraising event, the reaction amongst the Hands to Ethiopia members is mixed. During the dinner party at Pablo's home, Dorsey labels Professor Koazhy a perplexing paradox: "He wants to be a modern scholar as well as an African medicine-man … He's just a burlesque of an unconvincing pedant" (16). Tekla, on the other hand, admits to finding Professor Koazhy "amazingly convincing" (16), a confession that alarms Mrs. Castle, Newton Castle's erudite wife

(17). Pablo admits to initially being repulsed by Professor Koazhy but adds that "his stunt brought us a lot of money … he dominated that mighty crowd and that's a big achievement" (16). This scene teases the challenge of strategy creation while attempting to implement a Pan-Africanist agenda. Although people like Dorsey and Mrs. Castle prefer a more erudite approach to advocacy, pragmatists like Pablo and Tekla underscore the value of strategic fundraising. For Dorsey and Mrs. Castle, Professor Koazhy's exaggerated antics reduce Black identity to offensive stereotypes and archetypes. However, for Pablo and Tekla, marginalized Black populations need sufficient financial assistance to protect their sovereignty from invasive forces. Therefore, Professor Koazhy's inordinate performativity, however repulsive it may seem, is permissible if it is able to galvanize the masses and raise funds. Once again, the dinner party is functioning as a significant literary device because, in this instance, it symbolizes the challenge of executing a Pan-Africanist agenda. Although Pan-Africanists have the same goal, their approaches to implementing this goal dramatically varies.

Furthermore, Tekla symbolizes a profound cultural divide between Africans and African Americans, a divide that poses grave challenges for Pan-Africanist negotiations. Underscored throughout the novel are profound differences between Tekla and his Black American hosts. Despite their affinity for Ethiopia and Africa, Black Americans remain a product of Western Christian orientation. Thus, at the turn of the twentieth century, they too consumed and regurgitated the prejudiced imaginaries about the African continent widely publicized by imperialist Western nations. For example, Newton's reaction to the revelation that Professor Koazhy teaching classes about indigenous African culture is scathing and dismissive: "Aframerican students must go forward … they cannot go back to the primitive forms of savage Africa" (79). Additionally, Tekla's budding relationship with Seraphine, Pablo's beautiful and dim-witted daughter, exposes similar condescending attitudes about African culture. When Mrs. Peixota, Seraphine's mother, encourages her daughter to pursue a romance with Tekla, Seraphine is skeptical because she believes he might have a harem of subservient wives back "in Africa" (63). Mrs. Peixota is less worried; she is confident that he will be "civilized" if their union is based in America and not Ethiopia: "You'd be better off married to him in America than in that barbaric African land" (63).

There is also the issue of racial identification. Tekla is less interested in debating the artistic integrity of the Black race during a dinner party conversation in Pablo's home about the value of Black intellectualism and African art (16–17). Unlike his Black American hosts, he comes from a Black nation where race is largely nonexistent because almost everyone is Black and loyalties, as a consequence, are determined by ethnicity and not race. For Black Americans, second-class citizens in a predominantly white country, race remains omnipresent because their Blackness is in a constant state of delegitimization and dehumanization. This difference explains why, to Tekla, Harlem is an entirely foreign world, and he craves, and prays, "for a real understanding of these Aframericans, so that his mission might be crowned with success" (15). The implication

of these fundamental differences in orientation is that race alone cannot ensure the resoluteness of a Pan-Africanist alliance. Ethnic identities and cultural practices can easily supersede and even dismantle racial ties.

Despite these challenges, McKay has more faith in the prospects of a Pan-Africanist alliance than collaboration with the Stalinite agents of Soviet Russia. At the conclusion of *Amiable with Big Teeth*, Tekla, moved by Pablo's sympathy for his messy entanglement with Maxim Tasan, decides to reveal his shocking secret. He is indeed a fake representative of Emperor Selassie; his zealous patriotism inspired him to adopt a royal disguise and reach out to Pan-Africanist sympathizers in America (251). Because Tekla's actions were always motivated by advancing the Ethiopian cause, Pablo is unfazed by the revelation, "My confidence in you is not shaken," and offers Tekla, now a refugee due to Mussolini's occupation of Ethiopia, employment (252). A grateful Tekla profusely thanks Pablo and asserts that the experiential bond of Blackness unites the interests of people with African heritage: "Africans and Afroamericans everywhere … we have the stupendous task of demonstrating always before the white world to prove that humanity is not a special privilege and that we also are part of human race" (254).

Set against the backdrop of Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia, *Amiable with Big Teeth* creatively chronicles how the loss of Leninist Internationalism affected Black Harlem and exposed both the necessity and fragility of transnational political projects. After the Bolsheviks orchestrated the 1917 Revolution, Lenin sought to create an international Communist identity based on the egalitarian principle of collectivism.[72] The laboring, exploited classes, regardless of their gender, race, or nationality, were to become part of a global proletarian identity, a "worldwide Communist insurgency" that would subvert the bourgeoisie's capitalist hegemony.[73] My essay, I must reiterate, not does attempt to portray Leninist Internationalism as a foolproof ideology. As I stated earlier, the everyday functionality of Lenin's collectivist theory had its limitations. Foreign Communists residing in Soviet Russia, for example, were often viewed as inferior to their Russian counterparts.[74] Although Leninist Internationalism did not eradicate prejudices and nationalism, it represented a perceptible push to tie Soviet Russia's identity to the fate of the global laboring exploited classes. After Lenin's death, the assumption of Stalin to power and, in 1924, his "socialism in one country" policy swiftly redirected Soviet Russia's priorities from world revolution to national affairs.[75] Despite this shift in policy, Stalin remained keenly aware of Internationalist concerns and fostered alliances with foreign Communists in countries such as China[76] and America.[77]

In *Amiable with Big Teeth*, the principal episode used to argue for the loss of Leninist Internationalism is Stalin's decision to continue trade relations with Italy after Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia. McKay's lost novel accuses Stalin of prioritizing the regional profits generated by trade with Italy over the anti-imperialist and antifascist values of Internationalism (19). This accusation, I argue, does not fully nuance the

geopolitical complexities that informed Stalin's decision. In the 1930s, Hitler threatened to exterminate Communism by invading Soviet Russia.[78] Facing the risk of invasion from a militarily superior nation, Stalin required a reliable supply of ships and planes from Italy not only to defend Soviet Russia's territorial sovereignty but also to guarantee the ideological survival of Communism. Soviet Russia's decision to condemn Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia while continuing trade relations with Italy therefore demonstrates the fragility of transnational partnerships. While Black nationalists had Black sovereignty atop their scale of preference, Stalin prioritized Soviet Russia's territorial integrity and the ideological survival of Communism.

McKay's lost novel also focuses on the increasingly authoritarian nature of the dictatorship and Stalin's ruthless persecution of dissidents like Leon Trotsky (19–20). The novel views Stalin's antifascist and anti-imperialist Internationalist efforts as disingenuous because in addition to his trade alliance with a fascist dictator, he was using purges to eradicate his political rivals. Furthermore, the willingness of Stalinite loyalists like Maxim to uphold Stalin's Internationalist image at any cost, even if it meant undermining the sovereignty of Black-led groups, reveals the secondary status of Black interests within the Soviet Experiment. *Amiable with Big Teeth* thus argues that Black nationalists must redirect their focus to Pan-Africanist efforts.

However, racial solidarity, McKay's lost novel cautions its reader, is not enough to guarantee the successful operation of a Pan-Africanist congregation. Cultural variances and tensions between the diverse ethnicities represented in the Pan-African movement can easily sabotage race-based agendas by causing divided loyalties. With that said, McKay's lost novel has more conviction in the prospects of Pan-Africanism than an alliance with Stalin-era Soviet Russia. Although regional and cultural divisions exist and persist within Pan-Africanist congregations, *Amiable with Big Teeth* uses the transnational and transcendental bond between Pablo and Tekla to argue that the similarity of race-based experiences allows more room for mediating conflicts and negotiating common ground.

While there are some examples of successful Pan-Africanist efforts by organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), contemporary American society is still contending with ethnic tensions between Black Americans and Black immigrants/Africans. A newly emerged movement called the American Descendants of Slavery (ADOS) are stressing the uniqueness of their American ancestry as descendants of chattel slavery. They argue that because Black immigrants/Africans do not experience the racial stigma and historical trauma of American-style plantation slavery, they "are respected more than black Americans, all the while benefiting from reparations meant to right evils of America's past."[79] The contentiousness surrounding such arguments, dubbed the "the diaspora war" by some, "provides a peek into a debate about identity in America, raising questions about how a changing black population … sees itself and is seen by the majority."[80]

This is of course an incredibly complex conversation, and I only briefly mention it here because it echoes similar ethnic/racial fissures in *Amiable with Big Teeth* and

makes a case for the lost novel's contemporary relevance. The ideological and racial discourse McKay was engaging with in the 1930s remains relevant in our current society. Although Pablo and Tekla develop a profound understanding of each other, there is no guarantee that a similar understanding will be widely replicated at all levels within African diaspora communities. Profound divisions between other Black characters in the novel, and their approaches to implementing institutional agendas, persist. Thus, looming above *Amiable with Big Teeth*'s optimistic ending is the stark and perhaps uncomfortable reality that some cultural differences might never comfortably converge.

Notes

[1] Christoph Irmscher, "Rejecting Claude McKay: An Author's Lost, and Last, Novel," *Library of America*, August 21, 2017, https://www.loa.org/news-and-views/1318-rejecting-claude-mckay-an-authors-lost-and-last-novel

[2] Under the old Russian calendar, the October Revolution took place on October 25th. Under the regular calendar, which Russia would later adopt under Vladimir Lenin, the October Revolution took place on November 7th.

[3] Richard Pipes, "Did the Russian Revolution Have to Happen?" *The American Scholar* 63, no. 2 (1994): 224.

[4] Mark Sandle, *A Short History of Soviet Socialism* (Philadelphia, PA: UCL Press, 1999), 62.

[5] Golfo Alexopoulos, "Soviet Citizenship, More or Less: Rights, Emotions, and States of Civic Belonging," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 7, no. 3 (2006, New Series): 490, https://doi.org/10.1353/kri.2006.0030

[6] Alexopoulos, "Soviet Citizenship, More or Less," 490.

[7] Alexopoulos, "Soviet Citizenship, More or Less," 492.

[8] Sandle, *A Short History of Soviet Socialism*, 62.

[9] Alice Schuster, "Women's Role in the Soviet Union: Ideology and Reality," *The Russian Review* 30, no. 3 (1971): 260, https://doi.org/10.2307/128134

[10] Steven B. Rogers, *World War II in Europe: An Encyclopedia*, ed. David T. Zabecki (New York: Routledge, 2015), 40.

[11] Rogers, *World War II in Europe*, 40.

[12] Rogers, *World War II in Europe*, 40.

[13] Ronaldo Munck, *The Legacy of Marxism: Contemporary Challenges, Conflicts, and Developments*, ed. Matthew Johnson (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012), 78.

[14] Hereinafter referred to as America.

[15] Jennifer Wilson, "When the Harlem Renaissance Went to Communist Moscow," *The New York Times*, August 21, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/21/opinion/when-the-harlem-renaissance-went-to-communist-moscow.amp.html

[16] Talia Lavin, "35 Communist Propaganda Posters Illustrate the Art and Ideology of Another Time." *Huffington Post*, 26 December 2014, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/communist-propaganda-post_n_6377336?guccounter=1

[17] Claude McKay, "Soviet Russia and the Negro," *Crisis* 27 (December 1923): 61–65, http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/m_r/mckay/russia.htm

[18] McKay, "Soviet Russia and the Negro."

[19] McKay, "Soviet Russia and the Negro."

[20] Vaughn Rasberry, *Race and the Totalitarian Century: Geopolitics in the Black Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 202.

[21] Harry Haywood, *A Black Communist in the Freedom Struggle: The Life of Harry Haywood* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); and Joy Gleason Carew, *Blacks, Reds, and Russians: Sojourners in Search of the Soviet Promise* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008).

[22] Carew, Carew, *Blacks, Reds, and Russians*, 1.

[23] Carew, Carew, *Blacks, Reds, and Russians*, 1 and 2.

[24] Robert Vincent Daniels, *Russia: The Roots of Confrontation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 201.

[25] Dennis Mack Smith, *Mussolini* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981), 171–82.

[26] Melvin Eugene Page and Penny M. Sonnenburg, *Colonialism: An International, Social, Cultural, and Political Encyclopedia, Volume 1* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2003), 749.

[27] Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Great Depression* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005); and Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *"Or Does it Explode?" Black Harlem in the Great Depression* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[28] Allan H. Pasco, "Literature as Historical Archive," *New Literary History* 35, no. 3 (2004): 374, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20057844

[29] Nadia Nurhussein, *Black Land: Imperial Ethiopianism and African America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019).

[30] Jennifer Wilson, "A Forgotten Novel Reveals a Forgotten Harlem," *The Atlantic*, March 9, 2017. https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2017/03/a-forgotten-novel-reveals-a-forgotten-harlem/518364/

[31] See Page and Sonnenburg, *Colonialism,* 749.

[32] James H. Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935–1961* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 28.

[33] Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans*, 28.

[34] Page and Sonnenburg, *Colonialism,* 749.

[35] Page and Sonnenburg, *Colonialism,* 749.

[36] Page and Sonnenburg, *Colonialism,* 749.

[37] Page and Sonnenburg, *Colonialism,* 750.

[38] Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans*, 30.

[39] Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans*, 30.

[40] Richard I. McKinney, "The Black Church: Its Development and Present Impact," *The Harvard Theological Review* 64, no. 4 (1971): 458 and 459, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1509098

[41] Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans*, 30.

[42] Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans*, 30.

[43] Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans*, 30.

[44] References to the novel are from Claude McKay, *Amiable with Big Teeth* (London: Penguin Books, 2017), 3. Subsequent quotations will be cited in the text using parenthetical citation.

[45] Rogers, *World War II in Europe*, 40.

[46] Explanatory Notes in McKay, *Amiable with Big Teeth*, 289.

[47] Sandle, *A Short History of Soviet Socialism*, 158.

[48] Sandle, *A Short History of Soviet Socialism*, 158.

[49] Explanatory Notes in McKay, *Amiable with Big Teeth*, 289.

[50] Arnold Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes: Volume I: 1902–1941, I, too, sing America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 332.

[51] Jacob A. Zumoff, "The American Communist Party and the 'Negro Question' from the Founding of the Party to the Fourth Congress of the Communist International," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 6, no. 2 (2012): 73, https://doi.org/10.1353/jsr.2012.0012

[52] Zora Neale Hurston, "Why the Negro Won't Buy Communism," *Journal of Transnational America Studies* 5, no. 1 (2013); reprint, *The American Legion Magazine*, June 1951, 14–15 and 55–60, https://doi.org/10.5070/T851019735

[53] Daniels, *Russia: The Roots of Confrontation*, 201.

[54] Silvio Pons, *Stalin and the Inevitable War, 1936–1941* (London: Routledge, 2013), 1.

[55] Mack Smith, *Mussolini*, 171–82.

[56] Mack Smith, *Mussolini*, 171–82.

[57] Daniels, *Russia: The Roots of Confrontation*, 201.

[58] Daniels, *Russia: The Roots of Confrontation*, 201.

[59] Joseph Walwick, *Paul Robeson: Essays on His Life and Legacy*, ed. Joseph Dorinson and William Pencak (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2015), 124.

[60] Lindsey R. Swindall, *The Politics of Paul Robeson's* Othello (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 60.

[61] Fridrick Firsov, "The Comintern and Stalin's Terror," in *Reflections on the Gulag: With a Documentary Index on the Italian Victims of Repression in the USSR, Volume 37*, ed. Elena Dundovich, Francesca Gori, and Emanuela Guercetti (Milan: Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, 2003), 116.

[62] Dieter Heinzig, *The Soviet Union and Communist China 1945–1950: The Arduous Road to the Alliance* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 2.

[63] Heinzig, *The Soviet Union and Communist China 1945–1950*, 2.

[64] James Minahan, *The Former Soviet Union's Diverse Peoples: A Reference Sourcebook* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 176.

[65] Minahan, *The Former Soviet Union's Diverse Peoples*, 176.

[66] Alexopoulos, "Soviet Citizenship, More or Less," 492.

[67] Alexopoulos, "Soviet Citizenship, More or Less," 490.

[68] Minahan, *The Former Soviet Union's Diverse Peoples*, 176.

[69] Yuri Glazov, *The Russian Mind Since Stalin's Death* (Dordrecht, NL: Springer Science and Business Media, 2012), 190.

[70] Joy Gleason Carew, "Translating Whose Vision? Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Paul Robeson and the Soviet Experiment," *Intercultural Communication Studies* 23, no. 2 (2014): 7.

[71] Hakim Adi, *Global Africa: Into the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Dorothy Hodgson and Judith Byfield (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 91 and 90.

[72] Sandle, *A Short History of Soviet Socialism*, 62.

[73] Rogers, *World War II in Europe*, 40.

[74] Alexopoulos, "Soviet Citizenship, More or Less," 492.

[75] Sandle, *A Short History of Soviet Socialism*, 158.

[76] Peter S. H. Tang, "Stalin's Role in the Communist Victory in China," *The American Slavic and East European Review* 13, no. 3 (October 1954): 375.

[77] Daniels, *Russia: The Roots of Confrontation*, 201.

[78] Daniels, *Russia: The Roots of Confrontation*, 201.

[79] Valerie Russ, "Who is Black in America? Ethnic Tensions Flare between Black Americans and Black Immigrants," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 19 October 2018, https://www.inquirer.com/philly/news/cynthia-erivo-harriet-tubman-movie-luvvie-ajayi-american-descendants-of-slaves-20181018.html

[80] Russ, "Who is Black in America? Ethnic Tensions Flare between Black Americans and Black Immigrants."

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