

My PhD project focuses on the interchanges between African American and black Francophone writers and intellectuals during the inter-war period. Thanks to the European Association for American Studies Postgraduate Travel Grant, I was able to conduct a research at the Moorland Spingarn Research Centre at Howard University and at the Beinecke Library at Yale University from 2 to 18 September 2013.

The Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C.

Founded in 1914 by Dr. Jesse E. Moorland, the Moorland-Spingarn Research Centre is, according to its director, Howard Dodson, “one of the world's largest and most comprehensive research centers documenting the heritages of people of African descent.”¹ My main interest lied in the personal papers of two former Howard University professors, Alain Locke and Mercer Cook, who were key figures in the relations between African American and black Francophone artists of the period.

In *The Big Sea* (1940), Langston Hughes hails Dr. Alain Locke as one of the midwives of “the so-called New Negro literature” (218).² His essential contribution to the debates around the questions of racial uplift during the 1920s and 1930s, his active role in the construction of an emergent African American literary movement, and his publication of *The New Negro* (1926) situate him at the core of my project. During my stay in the United States, I had the opportunity to explore his personal papers. This research provided me with evidence that will enhance my thesis and helped me to have a better sense of Alain Locke’s involvement in the different aspects of the international interchanges I would like to scrutinize. For example, his correspondence with René Maran illustrates how black intellectuals tried to publicize an international conception of the black experience. The letters Locke exchanged with the Nardal sisters emphasizes the difficulties that such a vision aroused when it came to the translation of *The New Negro* into French, a project which was never completed.

I originally planned to explore the Mercer Cook Papers because I wanted to write a chapter about his stay in Paris in 1926. I thought that his personal papers would allow me to describe the life of the Parisian black community during the mid-1920s and the early 1930s. At that time, Louis Achille, René Maran and the Nardal sisters held salons in the French capital and young black students from Africa and the Caribbeans, such as L. S. Senghors, Aimé Césaire, and L.-G. Damas, were developing the ideas which would lead to the foundation of the Négritude Movement. However, the documents I found in the Mercer Cook Papers mainly dated from the 1940s. I was nevertheless able to find some very interesting details Mercer Cook remembered about the Francophone writers under consideration.

¹ This quote was borrowed from the MSRC website, http://www.howard.edu/msrc/about_director-greetings.html.

² Hughes, Langston. *The Big Sea* (1940). New York: Hill and Wang, 1993. Print.

The Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT

Part of the Yale Collection of American Literature, the James Weldon Johnson Collection held at the Beinecke Library³ was founded in 1941 by Carl van Vechten to commemorate the life of Dr James W. Johnson. It documents the African American experience from the heyday of the Harlem Renaissance to the 1950s. My stay in New Haven allowed me to focus on two major authors of the period, namely Langston Hughes and Claude McKay.

The Claude McKay Papers allowed me to understand more clearly the bitterness that the West Indian author displayed after the publication of *The New Negro* (1926). The letters he sent to Alain Locke were really useful to comprehend the reasons of his disappointment. Besides, the numerous clippings held in this collection allowed me to compare the reviews that the English and French editions of *Home to Harlem* (1928/1934) and *Banjo* (1929/1931) received when the novels first appeared in the United States and in France.

I had already explored the Langston Hughes Papers during my stay at Boston University as a Fulbright grantee in 2011. Knowing what I was looking for, I was able to concentrate my research on a specific aspect of Langston Hughes's career, namely his role as a translator. Reading his correspondence with Mercer Cook when they were translating Jacques Roumain's *Gouverneurs de la Rosée* (1944), I could discern more accurately his translation techniques and his working habits, and, more generally, have a better understanding of his willingness to promote black literature from around the world. His involvement in anthologizing African Francophone poetry at the end of the 1940s confirmed the impressions I had previously: Langston Hughes is a central figure in the post-war promotion of black literature as an international phenomenon. The material I collected from his papers will provide material for a conclusive chapter on the post-war era.

To do archival research in the United States was a rich and formative experience and I am convinced that it will immensely improve my thesis. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the European Association for American Studies for its support without which I could not have organized this research travel. My gratitude also goes to the staff of the Moorland-Spangarn Center and the Beinecke Library.

³ <http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>