

Between the “Author’s” Final Typescript  
and the “Corrupted” 1940 First Edition  
of Richard Wright’s *Native Son*:  
Reading Traces of a Non-Conformist Writer  
Trying to Outwit Censorship

Takashi NAKATANI

Introduction

The Library of America, a non-profit imprint that publishes and keeps in print anthologies of “canonized” American writers, issued an emended text of Richard Wright’s *Native Son* along with his other major works in two volumes in 1991.<sup>1</sup> The edition basically reproduces the text of the African American novelist’s final typescript,<sup>2</sup> which was heavily interfered with in the process of its first publication by Harper and Brothers in 1940, when the society’s view of things pertaining to sex was less tolerant and its discriminatory attitude toward “colored” population (not only African Americans but also Native Americans, Asian Americans, etc.) was worse than it is today. According to the “Note on the Texts” of the Library of America edition,<sup>3</sup> Edward Aswell, Wright’s editor at Harper, suggested revising the final typescript so that the novel would be accepted by the Book-of-the-Month Club and sell better (*Early* 911-13; *NS-LOA* 485-87). The novelist acquiesced to the proposal, probably at least partly because of his economic needs at the time, and made heavy revisions of the already set proofs based on the submitted final typescript for himself: as far as we can see in the “Notes,” or a brief apparatus, accompanying both the Library of

America edition and its paperback reprint (*Early* 923-35; *NS-LOA* 489-503), the rewriting primarily consists of purging elements the (mainly white) reading public would find offensive.

This is clearly a case of censorship, as Rowley justly points out and illustrates (Rowley 180-84). The novelist's responses to it, as well as those of his editor, on the other hand, are not paid enough attention to; whatever the reasons might be, Wright not only accepted his editor's suggestion but even rewrote substantial portions of the typescript submitted to the publisher (*Early* 911-13, 923-35; *NS-LOA* 484-87, 490-503). When we look at the efforts he has put into the process of the revisions, we can reasonably expect more than just a totally resigned attitude in dealing with the socio-economic demands of the consumer society with racist views of the world.

Although the idea that the "author" is a quasi-religious literary figure endowed with "genius," that the text he or she has produced is not to be tampered with for any reason, and that the editor is auxiliary at best and frequently harmful to the job of the "author," modern literary theories have been suggesting alternative views of publishing practice: most of them (for example, Anglo-American New Criticism and continental Structuralism and/or Post-Structuralism), putting into question the relevance of the "authorial" "intention" (Barthes 63-69; Wimsatt 3-18), have the text-centered view of literature in common. Then, reliability of the text is vital in modern literary studies, but in practice textual scholarship, namely, collation of variations of editions, manuscripts, etc., has generally been considered an esoteric field in literary study undertaken only by a rather small number of specialists. Text-centered criticism, consequently, has, at least in the Anglo-American tradition, been putting the very basis of the study in a "black

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box”: as Peter Shillingsburg aptly argues, “persons [literary critics and scholars] relying upon *authenticated* texts are relying, unquestioningly, on the judgment of other scholars—something scholars seldom do in other spheres of their activities” (Shillingsburg 4; emphasis added).

Moreover, publishing practices in the inter-war period in general and of Modernist writings in particular, contemporaneous with the “protest novel” in question, provide us with ample examples of how editors/advisors have influenced writers’ texts (Bryant 7): literary history of the era spotlights a number of star editors such as Bennet Cerf of Random House,<sup>4</sup> Harold Ross of the *New Yorker*,<sup>5</sup> Maxwell Perkins of Scribner’s (Bryant 7, 100), as well as Modernist writers themselves functioning as editors, such as Ezra Pound advising T. S. Eliot (Bryant 7, 91, 100; Bornstein 1).

In this essay I will call into question the Library of America’s claim that the text it provides is “definitive” (“Authoritative Texts”), collating and evaluating the two versions and their respective virtues and flaws. The argument will help shed some light upon implications of the textual conflict between the kind of censorship prevalent in a consumer society and the non-conformist writer’s attempts to outwit it in the case of this specific novel, whose “definitive” text is hardly to be established and which practically demonstrates that there are cases in which an institutionalized “definitive text” is not enough and might not be the only text useful for scholarly arguments.<sup>6</sup>

## 1. What Were and Were Not Censored and/or Repressed

The question of the “authority” of the “author” and/or “authenticated

text” in the case of *Native Son* is fraught with a paradox we often encounter when we are dealing with a Modernist text: the “final” text submitted for publication has been interfered with by an editor or an advisor, to be sure, but the novelist himself has not only approved of, or even “authorized,” the changes but also did the revisions for himself with great effort. This attitude on the part of the “author” makes it extremely difficult to determine where his “final” “intention” lies.

Major revisions of the text concern the two episodes in Book One, both of which involve sexuality of Thomas Bigger, a socially deprived young African-American protagonist: first, rewriting of the episode at a movie theater the Regal, omitting Bigger’s masturbation (*Early* 472, 924-27; *NS-LOA* 30, 490-93) before watching the newsreel introducing Mary, the white young woman and daughter of a man of high social standing who is going to employ him as a part of charity, and replacing it with the probably fictitious feature film *The Gay Woman* depicting the world of rich white men and women following “a short newsreel which Bigger [watches] without much interest” (*Early* 474-75, 924-27; *NS-LOA* 31-32, 490-93; *NS-’40FE* 33-35) in contrast with the following “Orientalist” feature film *Trader’s Horn*, which actually exists and in which stereotyped images of Africans are represented (*Early* 476, 924-27; *NS-LOA* 33, 490-93; *NS-’40FE* 35-36); second, deletion of his sexual arousal for and resulting timid molestation of Mary, whom he accidentally suffocates to death in fear that he would be taken for a stereotypical black rapist (*Early* 524, 930; *NS-LOA* 84, 498; *NS-’40FE* 84). The other alterations are mostly textual adjustments of things described and told in order to avoid contradictions in details resulting from these significant changes.

The 1940 first edition, consequently, is, first, so gentrified as to be

widely acceptable for the majority of the reading public of the period, probably consisting mainly of educated middle-class white people, and, second, the protagonist is desexualized, more "innocent" and less offensive (Bryant 7, 64-65), and, as his lawyer Boris Max claims in Bigger's trial in Book Three, more of a victim of social circumstances. We could therefore even say that the 1940 version is more suitable as a "protest novel," as the book has been widely considered to be. The Library of America version, in contrast, presents a protagonist more objectionable, more sexually driven, and less representative of African Americans in an impoverished urban environment. The description of his physical contact with Mary just before he accidentally suffocates her to death is as follows:

. . . He stared at her dim face, the forehead capped with curly black hair. He eased his hand, the fingers spread wide, up the center of his back and *her face came toward him and her lips touched his*, like something he had imagined. *He stood her on her feet and she swayed against him. He tightened his arms as his lips pressed tightly against hers and he felt her body moving strongly. The thought and conviction that Jan had had her a lot flashed through his mind. He kissed her again and felt the sharp bones of her hips move in a hard and veritable grind. Her mouth was open and her breath came slow and deep.* (*Early* 524, 930; *NS-LOA* 84, 498; *NS-'40FE* 83-84; italics and underlines added)

The underlined latter part of the text quoted is omitted in the 1940 version. In the first half, printed both in the 1940 and the Library of America versions, Bigger's physical contact with Mary is just accidental

and he takes no active part in it, while in the following latter half he, sexually aroused by the contact as well as by the idea that the girl is an object of desire for the white man he has met, willfully takes advantage of the situation and molests her. That is to say, in the first half he cannot be held responsible for the physical contact while in the latter he is responsible for it and we can even suppose that, if Mrs. Dalton had not appeared in the room, he might have actually gone further; in other words, in the 1940 version the accusation that he is a black rapist is wholly ungrounded while the Library of America version, though he did not actually rape her, does not deny the possibility of their interracial sex (Rowley 183).<sup>7</sup>

The gentrification of the text also affects characterizations of Mary, Jan (her lover and a member of the Communist Party), and Bigger (Bigger's girlfriend). When Mary secretly dates Jan with Bigger driving her family's car, she, while in the 1940 version she just gets drunk, in the Library of America version has sex with Jan in the back seat with Bigger in the front seat and looking at what they are doing in the rearview mirror (*Early* 518-19, 929; *NS-LOA* 78, 497; *NS-'40FE* 77-78). The description of their intercourse in the presence of the protagonist means, first, that Mary is a more sexually active girl and could be said to be more of a flapper who came a decade too late instead of just a basically innocent and well-meaning girl, as Peggy, a white maid at the Dalton's, says (*Early* 498, 928; *NS-LOA* 57, 495; *NS-'40FE* 58; in the 1940 version description of her opinion of Mary is expanded, and she says the girl's relationship with Communists, instead of the sign of her wild character, means nothing more than her charitable character similar to her parents'), and, second, that neither of them so much mind Bigger as another human being as to be too embarrassed to have sex in

his presence, their wild behavior betraying their probably unwitting racist view of the world.

As for Bessie, her relationship with Bigger is even more grievous in the Library of America version than in the 1940 version: while in the latter Bigger at least once shows feeling of love for her (" . . . To let her know that he *loved her he circled her waist with his arm and squeezed tightly.*" [Early 931; NS-LOA 499; NS- '40FE 125; emphases added]), his feeling toward her in the former is essentially carnal, as we can see in the corresponding part of the text quoted ("To let her know that he *wanted her he allowed her to draw his tongue into her mouth.*" [Early 567; NS-LOA 132; emphases added]). He even uses her as a substitute for his desire for Mary, whom he has already killed, in the Library of America version ("He placed his hands on her breasts *just as he had placed them on Mary's* last night and *he was thinking of that while he kissed her. . . .*" [Early 569; NS-LOA 134; emphases added]), which is revised in the 1940 version as follows, omitting references to Mary ("He leaned over her, full of desire, and lowered his head to hers and kissed her. . . ." [Early 931; NS-LOA 500; NS- '40FE 127]). The revision would mean more than just an adjustment of details necessitated by the omission of Bigger's molestation of Mary, which we have just seen above. We will deal with the implication of the difference in the next section.

These revisions, when seen in isolation, or when we just see what were censored, would just seem a concession to the lukewarm literary taste of the general reading public of the era, when the aftermath of the Great Depression was still strongly felt and people were questioning adequacy of capitalism,<sup>8</sup> that has made the 1940 version just a "corrupted" text. When we see them in conjunction with what are not censored, however,

the way Wright rewrote the novel will begin to shed light on traces of repressions, both socio-political and psychological, for there are elements that would be as offensive as, or even more unacceptable than, the revised portions of the text.

First, as the Bigger of the 1940 version is made into a less offensive character, with the possibility of his turning into a stereotypical “black rapist” erased, Max’s rather doctrinaire logic of defense in Book Three begins to seem to have some truth in it, although it artistically entails the negative effect of turning the lawyer into a sort of the novelist’s “mouthpiece,” for which the scene of the trial is often criticized. In addition, as Jan do not have sex with Mary in Bigger’s presence, his inadvertent racist attitude is purged from the text, making him and his fellow Communists appear more trustworthy as defenders of social justice, although Jan as a person with feelings remains unconvincing in the sense that few social activists would try to save someone who killed his own girlfriend while this defect could to some extent be alleviated if his feeling toward her is not love but just carnal desire. That is to say, although these changes make the novel somewhat awkward, its political implications, namely, that the “myth” of a “black rapist” is just an illusion and that Communists are noble-minded people fighting for social justice, are more unequivocally expressed, which would be less acceptable for the Conservatives, Capitalists, and the status quo based on inequalities among ethnic groups.

Second, the assertion that the charity on the part of well-meaning white people is ineffectual and even hypocritical is left unchanged; consequently, as the Bigger of the 1940 edition is more “innocent,” the statement made by Max, although the passages themselves are unchanged, becomes more convincing, put in a different context. Unlike the African



American writer's predecessors such as Booker T. Washington, and as if anticipating the following generations such as James Baldwin and Toni Morrison, Wright is ruthless about the well-meaning white people who nevertheless are unaware of and retain their privileged ethnic and socio-economic position.

Third, white population of the North as a whole is portrayed to be sharing racist mob feelings and attitudes with Southern whites, whose attitudes themselves appear in the text in Bigger's mention of his boyhood to Jan (*Early* 514-15; *NS-LOA* 74; *NS-'40FE* 74) and the article in the *Chicago Tribune* quoting the editor of the local paper of Jackson, Mississippi (*Early* 706-07; *NS-LOA* 280-81; *NS-'40FE* 261): their repeated cries, reminiscent of the chorus in a classic Greek tragedy, expressing their desire to lynch Bigger and degrading him to the status of an ape, perhaps reminding the reader of the Scopes "Monkey" Trials from 1925 through 1926, are left intact, as well as the burning cross on the top of the building suggesting the Ku Klux Klan (*Early* 760; *NS-LOA* 337; *NS-'40FE* 312), whose implication and memory are described to be so traumatic as to have been repressed in the protagonist's mind (*Early* 760-61; *NS-LOA* 337-38; *NS-'40FE* 312-13) and the mention of which, provocative to the secretly organized terrorist group, must have been dangerous for the publisher as well as for the writer at the time. Along with the descriptions of the ungrounded sensationalism of the journalism of the North, which I have already discussed in another essay on Wright, the "othering" of racism of the American society in general on the part of educated readers by localizing it to the South is made ineffectual, which would have been disturbing to them.

Though the writer was obliged to gentrify his novel mainly in respect

to the protagonist's sexuality and carnality, it still retains much of its social criticism and the power to challenge the complacency of liberal readers. In that sense we can say that he did a fairly good job when he rewrote the text so as to reach a wider range of the reading public.

## 2. Realist and Non-Realist/Modernist Elements Intertwined

The 1940 version, nevertheless, is not free from traces of censorship and forced revisions. As a whole, the Bigger of the Library of America version is "rounder" while in the 1940 version, with his sexuality tamed down and less explicit, his characterization is, therefore, rather "flat," to use E. M. Forster's paired concepts of the "flat character" and the "round character" (Forster 73). As long as we evaluate the versions according to the Realist criteria, the Library of America version could be said to present a more convincing characterization of the protagonist.<sup>9</sup> In addition, as his aspect as a carnal man is made inconspicuous, his relationship with Bessie, primarily based on sexual desire in the Library of America version, is made somewhat inconsistent with the mention of his love for her, which we have seen above.

Let us note, however, that the Realist novel embodies assumptions of the nineteenth-century Western bourgeois society, the outcome of bourgeois revolutions such as the American Revolution and the French Revolution, including the Romantic view of human beings ("men") as an independent, free, rational individual endowed with inherent human rights. That is to say, its frame of reference implicitly suggests that those who do not fit into these characteristics are not human or human enough; in that sense, the Realist novel, probably the leading genre of

the nineteenth-century literature, could be said to have been complicit in categorizing a lot of people as sub-human or even non-human and making them "invisible," and justifying Europeanization and colonization of the world as a fulfillment of the "white man's burden" during the era. Moreover, modern literature, in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, acquired the attribute of national literature, a cultural emblem of the "nation-state," as Benedict Anderson and E. J. Hobsbawm aptly point out. This characteristic, different from the "universalism" of classical literature, assumes the idea that being rooted in a native soil is the only natural condition of humanity.<sup>10</sup> The title of the novel, *Native Son*, could be regarded as an ironical negation of the ideology of rootedness, widely shared both by the right wing and the left wing of the era in common.

With no proper place to live in (from this point of view it seems no coincidence that Mr. Dalton runs a real-estate company) and socially conditioned to think about his world and experience in terms of what mass media say and present instead of what he actually sees and goes through,<sup>11</sup> Bigger does not comfortably fit into the Realist novel's frame of reference. In a novel dealing with social injustice, its political interests and its verisimilitude are frequently in conflict with each other, but we must remember that it is the censorship that made this novel's aspect as a "protest novel" more clear-cut, as we have seen in the previous section. We must say that it is a strange kind of censorship, in a society where, although people were more influenced by and sympathetic to Socialism and/or Communism in the aftermath of the Great Depression than the Americans today are, racist views remained basically unchallenged, were more or less taken for granted and ascribed mainly only to a limited small number of racially-bigoted chauvinists

supposed to be uneducated and mainly living in the South.

The most conspicuous mark of censorship, namely, desexualizing of the young and physically healthy male protagonist that has made him less convincing as a character in a Realist novel, although it has led to some inconsistencies as we have seen above, could today be considered less detrimental to the novel's literary value than the time when the book was first published, for explicit representation of human sexuality, for which Henry Miller and D. H. Lawrence are widely reputed in literary history, has lost most of its original power to defy the genteel literary taste of socio-cultural establishment probably after the 1960s. Substitution of the original newsreel with a fictitious feature film, probably required as a part of gentrification to prevent the rich white man's daughter from becoming a black man's object of desire, in consequence entails another paradox: the Library of America version in effect suggests that he has internalized and shares the idea that, although he does not like Mary as a person, a white woman is more desirable and charming than a black woman (*Early* 569; *NS-LOA* 134) as the result of her being portrayed as an object of desire of white men both in the episode of the newsreel (the coincidence of Bigger happening to see the daughter of his future employer there makes the novel less convincing according to the Realist standard) and in that of Jan having sex with her, thus revealing the irony inherent in the white-supremacist view that it is, when applied to the attractiveness of women, in defiance of the miscegenation taboo, an acute obsession of white men in the United States. As Jacques Lacan repeatedly says, man's desire is the Other's desire (Lacan 690), and this characterization is specifically fitting for Bigger, who, as we have seen above, thinks in terms of the view of the world presented by the media.

We, then, will also have to pay attention to non-Realistic aspects of

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the Library of America version and to logically consistent aspects of the 1940 version as well. The latter version, in spite of some inconsistencies of characters we have seen above, could be evaluated more coherent in the logic the text presents; logical consistency is an imperative of the seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century rationalism as the product of the Enlightenment, and consequently at the basis of the nineteenth-century Realist novel.

This internal conflict of Realistic and non-Realistic or even Modernist elements, entwined as on a Möbius strip and refusing to be simply ascribed to either of the versions, would be a reflection of the way Bigger is as well as his experiences, both of which are in principle alienated from the world the nineteenth-century Realist novel (in other words, the so-called "ordinary" novel) has had within its scope. As a result, the writer was obliged to improvise a way or method to articulate the world of this inarticulate protagonist. The young man seldom knows and articulates to himself what he is doing, and, moreover, he tends to give meanings in hindsight, often incongruous with truth, to what he inadvertently did.

In that sense, Max's often criticized rather lengthy assertion that he is a victim of the injustice of the racist society (Baldwin 31) could be of interest not because it explains why his client did what he did (his statements often contain misunderstanding of facts and is unsuitable for the end of protecting the defendant) but because it, first, resembles his client's way of thinking and, second, the lawyer gradually realizes that his rather doctrinarian claims, largely dictated by the Party's utopian ideology, are not what he wants to and has to say. When he first meets Bigger, he paternalistically talks and behaves, like Jan, as if he knows what he can and should do better than either the would-be client or

Reverend Hammond (*Early* 714-18; *NS-LOA* 288-93; *NS-'40FE* 268-72). When the trial is lost and his appeal to the Governor turned down, he realizes that he is old, helpless, does not know what he can do (*Early* 838-50; *NS-LOA* 418-30; *NS-'40FE* 381-92): after the trial Bigger feels Max's hand on his arm, and in the last scene "Max went to him and grabbed his shoulders" (*Early* 838, 845; *NS-LOA* 417, 425; *NS-'40FE* 381, 388), probably the protagonist's only bodily contacts with a white described in the text other than those of formality or those resulting from necessity; in the last scene Max asks Bigger "Is there anything I can do for you, Bigger?" and "Is there anything you want me to do . . . ?" (*Early* 842; *NS-LOA* 422; *NS-'40FE* 385); Bigger, as if in response to the lawyer's change, says, "I'm glad I got to know you before I go!" (*Early* 843; *NS-LOA* 423; *NS-'40FE* 386); Max helplessly listens to Bigger's confused and illogical story of his killings so absurd and yet terrifying to Max as to sound Existentialist (*Early* 845-49; *NS-LOA* 425-29; *NS-'40FE* 388-92), and tries to respond sincerely when he asks him to say what he does not want to say (*Early* 846; *NS-LOA* 426; *NS-'40FE* 389).

In a society so idealistic and utopianistic like America, acknowledging the helplessness of one's own situation and society is hardly acceptable. When the lawyer learns to accept his own helplessness and ineffectiveness, saying, "I'm glad I got to know you, too, Bigger. I'm sorry we have to part this way. But I'm too old, son. I'll be going soon myself . . ." (*Early* 843-44; *NS-LOA* 423; *NS-'40FE* 386-87) as if asking for an visionary father-and-son relationship with the condemned convict, he hints at a possible and tragic solace for the protagonist and for the reader. Perhaps the primary problem with the 1940 version is not its lesser degree of Realistic verisimilitude, convincingness, and consistency but, on the

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contrary, leaving more room for reading the novel as a utopianistic "protest novel" with a coherent political message,<sup>12</sup> allowing the reader to reinforce an optimistic view of the United States in progress, bravely reforming its own society to achieve its ideal of a truly democratic society.

### 3. Publishing as a Social Practice

In the first section I have argued that in spite of censorship Wright did a fairly good job in rewriting it so as to reach wider range of readers while I concluded the second section with the implication that I, on the ground of my personal literary taste rather than on scientific ones, rather prefer the Library of America version. We will then have to ask why the novelist made compromises to have the novel released through the Book-of-the-Month Club.

Wright took active roles in promoting the novel by taking part in creating, to use Gérard Genette's terminology, at least two paratexts of the book: he wrote an essay "How 'Bigger' Was Born," based on the two lectures at Columbia University and Schomburg Library at Harlem, and published it in magazines, as a pamphlet, and finally as an appendix to the novel (*Early* 913-14; *NS-LOA* 487); he also played the role of Bigger, though he was already middle-aged and more than twice as old as his protagonist, in the cinema adaptation of the novel filmed in Argentina and released in 1951. From today's point of view their significance for the novel seems rather uncertain: the essay, though of some interest in itself, does not particularly provide relevant information to understand the novel better, and in the cinema adaptation, which was not very successful,

the author was, ridiculously and humiliatingly, listed second in the movie's opening credit, below the actress playing the role of Mary Dalton.

To sum up, Wright was exceptionally permissive in how the work was treated by the cultural industry, which was not the case with his other writings. We can only guess why he agreed to make substantial revisions of the text, to give lectures and write an essay for its promotion, and even to play an active role in the cinema adaptation that hardly did justice to the novel. It is easy to say that he needed money (like everyone else); Rowley mentions him ordering new suits, getting new ties, and even buying a house in Chicago for three thousand dollars with the advance from Book-of-the-Month Club (Rowley 185), perhaps implying that his motivation was mercenary. But there is nothing wrong with enjoying life with the money earned honestly (contrary to Rowley's low opinion of the 1940 version that "his novel was no longer the same book that had crossed the [Book-of-the-Month Club] judges' desk [in the summer of 1939]" [Rowley 183], I have shown my idea that the writer did a fairly good job in rewriting it at the end of section one above); the writer buying new suits, ties, and even a house also could be construed as a sign that he was not so financially pressed, which in turn suggests that he was not so forced to make compromises to meet his economic needs at the time.

I, in addition, would like to call attention to the fact that literature after the bourgeois revolutions at the end of the eighteenth century has been forced to be intrinsically different from classical literature before the revolutions, with the base of literary production fundamentally changed with the virtual disappearance of aristocratic patrons.

Émile Zola, a French writer,<sup>13</sup> positively appreciates this change, saying that the disappearance of literary salons indicates the diffusion



of taste, the always increasing expansion of the public, that as the opinion is no longer formed by the small select groups it happens that it is the crowd of readers themselves that judge and decide the success, that the salons can no longer dominate the multitude refusing to obey (Zola 407), that what should today give us dignity and respect is money, that it is silly to declaim against money (Zola 408), that, having money, one dared to say all, and that money emancipated the writer and created modern literature (Zola 409).<sup>14</sup> After more than half a century, in the United States, where the aristocratic patron's influence was negligible on one hand and brutal aspect of Capitalism was more strongly felt in the aftermath of the Great Depression, Wright would not have been so positive about the liberating aspect of literature based on a market economy, but it still remains true that money earned by writing means, to some extent, the support of a large number of the reading public and contributes to secure the writer's freedom to say what he or she wants to say.

Zola's dichotomy of small literary salons and the multitude of disobedient readers, on the other hand, does not simply apply to the racist society of the mid-twentieth-century America, where the multitude of the reading public were not monolithically united but ethnically and economically hierarchized and the oligarchy of big publishing houses played a role reminiscent of the exclusive and select literary salons. It was therefore necessary to outwit the censorship of the genteel literary taste of the establishment so that the writer would have a chance to let his writing known to a wider range of the reading public and have it gradually infiltrate into their mind.

In a modern society, where market economy prevails, declaiming against the masses as benighted consumers of cultural industry's products and retreating into the refined high culture for the educated few would

not be an effective measure to deal with it; such a purist attitude would even be socially irresponsible for a writer to take. Richard Wright during 1939-40 was still a newcomer in the literary world of the United States and the status of African American literature at the time was much less secured and established than today; in such circumstances, it makes sense to make some compromise where it is possible, though it is equally necessary to draw a line about where to stop, so as to make writing and publishing a literary work a socially effective practice.

### Conclusion

We have seen that, although the Library of America version seems more preferable, at least to my personal literary taste, Wright did a fairly good job in outwitting censorship with the 1940 version, and the compromise could be justified as a practically tactical one, considering the socio-cultural conditions of the period.

As two versions are readily available today, it is possible to combine better portions of the versions and create an eclectic “ideal” text. But I am against the idea because the attempt would make the history of *Native Son*’s publication invisible. I am also against relinquishing the 1940 version as a merely “corrupt” text; it would be best to keep both versions in print, or at least to keep the paratext of “Notes” or apparatus appended to the novel’s text. Accepting the rather disquieting idea that there are two versions of the novel, we will be able to continue reading traces of censorship and their implications.

The traces show that, while the majority of the readers of the United States in that period were fairly prepared to confront the racist aspect of

their society and its compromised promise, they were still clinging to the humanitarian idea of enlightened and conscientious white people saving victims of ethnic prejudices, and that they could not reconcile themselves with the idea that the oppressed, instead of remaining victims waiting to be saved, could avenge themselves in some act of hatred, or with the idea that young white girls of a respectable family or of a high society might not be so "innocent" as they expected them to be.

As we have seen in the introduction, textual scholarship and modern text-centered critical theories, regrettably, have mostly been working apart, though today the oversight is gradually beginning to be criticized. Their collaboration in literary studies would not only be aesthetically significant but also socially and politically vital, for it is highly probable that a large numbers of socially dissenting non-conformist writers' texts are more frequently damaged or even silenced by censorship in a broader sense. There still remain a lot to be done by textual scholarship for the writings of minority writers, especially of earlier generations, to save them from oblivion and/or inaccuracies.

Notes

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- 1 *Native Son* is included in the volume *Early Works*, along with *Lard Today!* and *Uncle Tom's Children*. References to this edition will be parenthetically cited as *Early*.
- 2 To be precise, the Library of America text is not an exact reproduction of the typescript submitted to Harper; it takes the typescript as the copy-text but has been emended where minor corrections are deemed necessary. In this essay, however, I do not go into such details and limit my argument pertaining to textual scholarship to collation and evaluation of the two published versions because further study in that area would make it necessary to consult other manuscripts and typescripts, available at several institutions but rather hard to access. I will therefore leave out of account differences between the first submitted typescript and the restored text and just roughly refer to them as the “Library of America version” and to the texts of the first edition and its reprints as the “1940 version.” Both versions are also available in paperbacks at present, and references to the paperback edition of the Library of America version will parenthetically cited as *NS-LOA* and to that of the 1940 version as *NS-'40FE*.
- 3 This note, though not bylined, is presumably written by Arnold

Rampersad, who compiled the following "Notes," or the apparatus showing the 1940 variant in addition to notes to several proper nouns and to factual references.

- 4 Cerf is a co-founder of the publisher, which continues to publish works of leading American writers, with a number of distinguished imprints such as Knopf.
- 5 Ross is a co-founder of the *New Yorker* and made the magazine famous for publishing first-rate short stories, including those by John Updike.
- 6 I have to admit that in my essay published in 1997 on *Native Son* I was ignorant of its textual problem, although the Library of America had already published the emended version, when I made an argument on the novel's Modernist aspects, apparently less prevalent in the emended text than in the 1940 version. I do not mean my argument more than a decade ago was ungrounded but that, with due attention to the other version, I could have more adequately clarified the premises of my argument, following a fundamental procedure of an academic discussion.
- 7 Rowley, however, goes on with the argument of the effect of this alteration and says that the omission of the latter half "made Bigger look like a potential black rapist" (Rowley 183), but I, on the contrary, construe the change as a part of desexualizing the protagonist.
- 8 Let us note that the 1930s, when people showed such positive attitudes toward Socialism and Communism, is an exceptional period in the history of the United States. Even in the 60s, the era of dissent and social protest, the majority of liberal, progressive, or radical Americans were not sympathetic toward these political ideas.

- 9 Forster, of Realist disposition unlike his contemporary Modernists, implies that the “round character” is more desirable while admitting some advantages of the “flat character” when he proposes the well-known dichotomy (Forster 74-81).
- 10 I have critically discussed this ideology and its inadequacy in understanding the human conditions of the twentieth century, pointing out the long history of alienation of African Americans and Native Americans from their native soil in an essay titled “Minorities, Modernism, and Expatriation/Expatriates,” referring to Malcolm Cowley, Simone Weil, and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.
- 11 I have already dealt with this tendency of Bigger’s thinking in my essay “Richard Wright’s *Native Son* and the Modernism Age.”
- 12 James Baldwin’s criticism of the novel in “Many Thousands Gone” is an example of regarding the characterization of Bigger as an attempt to create the image of a representative protester avenging injustices done to his fellow black people; the argument of the essay, first published in *Partisan Review* in 1951 and collected in *Notes of a Native Son* in 1955, is obviously based on the 1940 version (Baldwin 19-34, 856).
- 13 Rowley says that “France had always been Wright’s dream” and that “Zola and Maupassant had been early literary models” (Rowley 326).
- 14 Summary and translations from the French text are mine.

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