

Part Three/Thesis Three

The FBI Is Perhaps the Most Dedicated and Influential Forgotten Critic of African American Literature

Caught out in a self-lacerating mood, J. Edgar Hoover once returned an FBI memo on the problem of James Baldwin with a handwritten challenge: "Isn't Baldwin a well-known pervert?" (U.S., Federal, Baldwin, 20 July 1964). Despite the career-threatening context, M. A. Jones, an officer of the FBI Crime Records Section, answered Hoover's marginal question by carefully distinguishing between fictional and personal testimonies. "It is not a matter of official record that he is a pervert," Jones stipulated, even though "the theme of homosexuality has figured prominently in two of his three published novels. Baldwin has stated that it is also 'implicit' in his first novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. In the past, he has not disputed the description of 'autobiographical' being attached to the first book" (20 July 1964). "While it is not possible to state that he is pervert," Jones concluded, Baldwin "has expressed a sympathetic viewpoint about homosexuality on several occasions, and a very definite hostility toward the revulsion of the American public regarding it" (20 July 1964). Hoover did not glide gently into agreement with Jones's subtle distinctions among sexual acts, sympathies, and representations, echoes of the New Critical-style fastidiousness that led a New York agent to consider the intentional fallacy in the case of Larry Neal. Less enlightened FBI informants continued to protest higher education's embrace of a Baldwin novel they mistakenly called *Another World*, remarkable for its depiction of "a Negro male making love to a white female" (1 Feb. 1966). (The 1962 novel Baldwin actually titled *Another Country* was somehow reconceived by these informants as a bohemian soap opera.) The Bureau director thus continued to explore ways to ban Baldwin's book under the

Interstate Transportation of Obscene Matter statute—this despite the report of the Justice Department's General Crimes Section that "*Another Country* by James Baldwin has been reviewed . . . and it has been concluded that the book contains literary merit and may be of value to students of psychology and social behavior" (13 Sept. 1963). With rival units in the Justice Department discovering the novel's redeeming social importance, it was left to Hoover and like-minded Bureau sticklers to contemplate *Another Country's* resemblance to the landmarks of modernist obscenity. "In many aspects it is similar to the *Tropics* books by [Henry] MILLER," wrote Washington, D.C.'s special agent in charge (19 Sept. 1962). For this reason, perhaps, the SAC ostentatiously instructed that his borrowed copy "need not be returned" to his office (19 Sept. 1962).

Blurb-worthy praise is not the norm in the FBI's more than fifty files on Afro-modernist writers: the General Crimes Section looks to be a better source of pull quotes applauding "literary merit" and "value to students of psychology and social behavior." Yet the risky refinement of M. A. Jones's reply to Hoover's leading question, its overspilling of the need to label, discipline, and punish, is emblematic of more than a few Bureau readers' indulgence of writers' prerogatives. Hoover himself, we have learned, possessed an inflated wariness and respect for the authors who doubled as "thought-control relay stations" (qtd. in Robins 50). Authors/relay stations of special prominence, W.E.B. Du Bois included, were at times spared in-person interviews by Bureau agents for fear of their "access to the subversive press," a megaphone whose range the FBI exaggerated (U.S., Federal, W.E.B. Du Bois, 12 Oct. 1960). Total Literary Awareness, COINTELPRO minstrelsy, and other instruments of Bureau counterliterature took the opposition seriously enough to fight on its own literary turf. Moreover, despite all the resources devoted to frustrating black literary communication, Bureau encounters with Afro-modernist writing could not always resist the pleasures of the enemy text.

FBI ghostreaders, the files confide, succumbed to the spell of African American literature in several genres. To begin with a familiar figure, the Philadelphia G-Man sent to paint a true picture of communist influence on Lorraine Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun* discovered a drama worthy of first-rate characterological analysis. The receptive insight of this agent's review—it would receive a noninflated A in many college English classes—flowed from inspiration beyond the call of police duty. With its swelling existential vocabulary, his sketch of Beneatha Younger, an articulately dissatisfied Hansberry character searching for "a means of self-expression and self-identification," doubles as a confession of his own unfulfilled literary need (U.S., Federal, Hansberry, 5 Feb. 1959). A G-Man Gustave Flaubert, this reviewer might as well have admitted of Mademoiselle Younger, *c'est moi*.

In their less-sensitive fashion, the unnamed Bureau authors of a case summary in Chester Himes's file were moved to compose capsule interpretations of every early story he placed in *Esquire* magazine. Ordered to check for treasonous speech during World War II, these authors decide at the outset that none of Himes's "fiction articles" incorporates "material which could be termed seditious" (U.S., Federal, Himes, 8 Jan. 1945). Even so, they gloss seven separate stories in turn, all of their brief rewritings specifying Himes's "descriptive material," philosophical and "sordid" (8 Jan. 1945). Both Larry Neal's file and Amiri Baraka's file contain copies of a frankly titled "Book Review" of *Black Fire*, the agenda-setting Black Arts anthology they coedited in 1968. As part 2 has testified, G. C. Moore, an FBI associate director and designated critic of the collection, acceded to the tenet of racially distinct faculties of aesthetic judgment, the first law of Black Arts criticism. *Black Fire* "obviously was . . . not written for the minds of white critics," he admitted (U.S., Federal, Neal, 29 Apr. 1969). But racial distance could not prevent this stimulated white reviewer from issuing both praise and damnation. Before reproducing Charles Anderson's poem "Prayer to the White Man's God" as a characteristic Black Arts text, Moore quotably describes a "flaming indictment of American prejudice" paired with a "love of all things black—black people, black traditions, black voices, black art, and black futures" (U.S., Federal, Baraka, 29 Apr. 1969). The anthology's "ample servings of filth" and "'far out' . . . method of presentation," he judges, are balanced by a handful of "works [that] tend to have an energy that succeeds in impressing one with the violence and passion of the author's emotions" (29 Apr. 1969). Moore ends with his finger on the scale, emphasizing *Black Fire's* general disorder: "the expression never achieves the precision and control which are the hallmarks of successful art" (29 Apr. 1969). Even this censure, however, rests on artistic grounds, not moral or criminological ones. In the end, *Black Fire's* contributors are cleared of tight-knit plans for urban violence and convicted of emotionally sloppy neo-Romanticism, a noncriminal violation of one remaining aesthetic universal.

Further literary surrenders, identifications, and judgments on the part of FBI readers could be mentioned, but the point has been made: while at least one Bureau agent insisted that "we've never held ourselves out as great book reviewers," the Bureau's many files on Afro-modernists are, among other things, recognizably literary-critical documents (qtd. in Robins 401). Elizabeth Renker's history of the academic profession of American literature distinguishes between a primary archive of formal literary-critical interpretation and a secondary archive of literary-critical bureaucracy, the latter composed of such tedious documents as "course catalogs, hiring records, administrative bulletins, presidents' reports, minutes of departments meetings, [and] curriculum

development materials" (Renker 6). In the case of FBI literary criticism, the equivalents of these two archives jostle within the very same files. The mixed genre of the FBI author file thus incorporates more than bureaucratic "judicial text" and identity-fixing "police text," types of Bureau file prose distinguished earlier in *F.B. Eyes*. It also includes literary-critical text, a strain of writing administrative, evaluative, and sometimes appreciative in nature. It is not too much to propose that the FBI's reading-intensive files qualify as works of literary commentary, state-subsidized explications debating informal curricula and obliquely bidding for interpretive dominance. By the same token, it is no exaggeration to claim that the G-Men compelled to supply these files with literary notes and queries qualify as critic-spies.

Recognizing the similarity of the creative writer and the espionage agent has been a minor staple of British literary culture since the (pre-Harlem) English Renaissance. An Elizabethan "dramatist-spy" such as Christopher Marlowe, remarks John Michael Archer, knew that his work on both sides of the hyphen depended on the "necessary lie" and on "observation of men and manners [that] made their manipulation through spectacle possible" (75). A century later, Daniel Defoe, one father of the modern English novel, also helped to parent the British state spy service and, just as significantly, a long line of British intelligence officers who found their mirror image in the fiction maker (Riebling 83). Freed by modernity to embrace the silence, exile, and cunning undergirding the writer-spy allegory (Hollander xviii), John le Carré, Ian Fleming, Graham Greene, T. E. Lawrence, Compton Mackenzie, and Somerset Maugham all walked in Defoe's double footsteps, their stories and novels of the great game of intelligence coloring the imaginations of spy colleagues as well as civilian readers. ("The use of "mole" to refer to a penetration agent, for instance, became identifying slang among intelligence officers only after its introduction by le Carré [Riebling 83].) But what of the less-familiar allegory of the *critic* and the spy? What, in particular, of the all-American, file-stuffing figure of the FBI ghostreader, as I call this Hooverite agent of state interpretation? What were the habits, convictions, and effects of the Bureau critic-spies whose observation of texts was enabled by decryption, identity theft, and hermeneutics of suspicion—techniques academic critics often share with intelligence agents—but also by systematic FBI surveillance?

This third part of *F.B. Eyes* looks for answers to these questions down several intersecting paths. Together, its first two sections illuminate the interpretive assumptions of Bureau ghostreading against the backdrop of the best-documented entanglement of American criticism with American espionage: namely, the firsthand stamp of the New Criticism on the counterintelligence branch of the

Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). CIA-endorsed formalism, its high-wire, Yale-rooted history explored in section 1, was eventually integrated into FBI critical practice. As section 2 confirms, however, Bureau ghostreaders cobbled together a distinct mode of FBI reading decades before the CIA's creation, a didactic yet meticulous biohistoricist in sympathy with academic schools of the late 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s. Even the Bureau's postwar assent to aspects of the New Criticism, various FBI files show, did not drown out the siren call of Marxian ideology critique, a forte of Depression-era critical culture that FBI critic-spies retooled to combat the Marxist pole of the Cold War.

Section 3 asks into the background and outlook of the FBI agents tasked with criticizing Afro-modernism. With the exception of M. A. Jones, G. C. Moore, and other Bureau executives authorized to sign commissioned review essays, Hoover's individual ghostreaders tend to disappear behind cloaks of bureaucratic anonymity and later FOIA censorship; the depersonalized, monogamous "poetics of the personal file," we noted earlier, perversely fulfills the anti-bourgeois desire for communal composition (Vatulescu 14). Even so, the literary lives and opinions of two supervising editors at the FBI—Robert Adger Bowen of the Bureau of Translations and William C. Sullivan of the Domestic Intelligence Division—have been detailed on the record and here serve to address the irresistible bourgeois question of whodunit. Finally, section 4 assesses the impact of FBI ghostreading on an interested non-Bureau audience: not, in this case, African American writers themselves, their literary responses to FBI counterliteratures outlined in part 5, but the self-appointed model citizens who turned to Hoover as a literary-critical wise man and potential literary-critical collaborator. Despite the privileged contents of FBI files, a fairly accurate impression of the Bureau's attentiveness to Afro-modernist literature escaped the Washington Beltway, refueling the machinery of ghostreading with correspondence warmly imagining the state apparatus as a community of patriotic bookworms. Employed to analyze the Bureau as a literary-critical institution, the compromised evidence provided in liberated FBI files is again no fast lane to absolute knowledge. Yet enough is revealed to propose the third and thus far most literary of our five theses: *The FBI is perhaps the most dedicated and influential forgotten critic of African American literature.*

Reading Like a CIA Agent

Before Ian Fleming retired to his money-spinning James Bond novels, intrigues pitting the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) against the global terrorists of SPECTRE, he labored to capture another vicious clash between enemy

espionage outfits: the embryonic war between the FBI and CIA. The pre-Bond Fleming, a British naval commander sent on a nonfictional secret mission to the United States in 1941, reckoned that a world-class foreign intelligence service could not be built by England's Atlantic ally without the voluntary movement of an immovable obstacle, one J. Edgar Hoover. In a private meeting with the Bureau director at FBI headquarters, Fleming and another visiting officer respectfully rehearsed a list of British recommendations for improved wartime espionage (Riebling 10). Last but not least on their list was a proposal for a new office to take charge of overseas spy work while coordinating all branches of American intelligence, the FBI not excepted. The Brits' target of persuasion, Fleming wrote, was "a chunky enigmatic man with slow eyes and a trap of a mouth" who listened with quiet concentration (qtd. in Riebling 10). When Hoover opened his trap in response, he bared what Fleming called "toes covered with corns"—in less thickly metaphorical words, exquisite sensitivity to the threat to FBI sovereignty in the clamor for a U.S. central intelligence agency (qtd. in Riebling 10). Civilly but unmistakably, Hoover pronounced himself unmoved by his callers' wish list; without fanfare, he was already handling U.S. foreign intelligence operations in Latin America (a development pursued in part 4 of *F.B. Eyes*). Fleming thus left FBI headquarters with further ingredients for spy fiction, not the go-ahead for a U.S. counterpart to James Bond's internationally savvy MI6, licensed to kill outside the polite limits of the United Kingdom.

Despite the glamorously hush-hush wartime successes of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the CIA's immediate predecessor, Hoover in fact helped to delay the establishment of U.S. central intelligence until the 1947 passage of President Harry Truman's National Security Act. The FBI's Republican allies on Capitol Hill even then insured that the new agency could not access Bureau files, the sanctum of Hoover's charismatic-bureaucratic power, except in cases vital to national security, so declared only in written requests by the CIA director (Riebling 77). Nor could the CIA assume "police, subpoena, law-enforcement powers or internal security functions" when gathering intelligence on U.S. soil ("National Intelligence"). This second limitation, breached too often in practice, was a good thing for American democracy, and a sharp-eyed anticipation of the issues sparking the FBI-CIA rivalry that exceeded trifling motives of ego and turf. Mark Riebling, a scholar of the unyielding wedge between the two intelligence outfits, explains that the CIA's code of "extra-legal virtue" in the world-historical struggle with communism did not suit it for domestic police work (85). More to the point, "this Cold War code grew and operated against the grain of J. Edgar Hoover's basic task, the

enforcement of the very laws the CIA would try to break" in the hunt for Soviet game (86). Hoover's legalism, particularly on the counterliterary beat, was not quite as basic as that. All the same, the CIA's gung-ho tackling of covert actions in which the pretense of fair play was consciously abandoned indeed increased the divide between the two agencies, arguably culminating in the series of bungled communications before 9/11.¹

Easily caricatured cultural differences, too, kept the two pillars of U.S. state intelligence at arm's length. Though transposable media stars, Hoover's dark-suited G-Men were snobbishly dismissed by OSS types as "Irish-Catholic Texans from second-rate law schools," organization men willing to tolerate the FBI dress code and other microtyrannies thanks to formative training in high school football and the Marine Corps (Riebling 8). Focusing further east but hitting just as hard on class, ethnic, and educational differences, CIA wits insisted that the initials FBI really stood for "Fordham Bronx Irish" (Richard Gid Powers, *Broken* 356). FBI agents retaliated by insulting OSS analysts as WASPy "Oh, So Socials" hired straight from Ivy League eating clubs. The typical CIA agent they later pictured combined foppishness and recklessness less appealingly than Fleming's James Bond. Only a preppy adventurer inexperienced with physical violence, they imagined, would court danger like the ironically self-involved "Company" man. CIA higher-ups, meanwhile, did little to discourage the impression of their agency as an exclusive state university run by robust eggheads. CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia, was nicknamed "the campus," a far cry from the Bureau's Seat of Government, a headquarters handle betraying Hoover's erratically repressed rivalry with the White House. "By the mid-1960s," reports Frances Stonor Saunders, the CIA bragged "that it could staff any college from its analysts, 50 per cent of whom held advanced degrees, 30 per cent doctorates" (236). The FBI's law and accounting graduates, closer to 100 percent of the agent corps, were better prepared to staff an imaginary professional school, an institution far from Berkeley and other Hoover-investigated hotbeds of student radicalism.

Foreign-language expertise was many times more common at the CIA than at the FBI. Yet if the CIA had ever committed to building a conventional university, its most distinguished department would have been English. Even British historians are bound to admit that the anglophone "man of letters" was, if anything, even more conspicuous a figure in the upper echelons of the American secret service than in MI6" (Wilford 99). There were American creative writers with more or less furtive lives in the CIA—William F. Buckley, John Hunt, Edward S. Hunter, Robie Macauley, Peter Matthiessen, Jack Thompson, and others—though relatively few with the talent of their British cousins. (For quick

and dirty illustration of this difference, compare the espionage fiction of (a) MI6 veteran David John Moore Cornwell, better known by his pen name, John le Carré; and (b) CIA “political action specialist” David St. John, better known by his given name, E. Howard Hunt, the unquiet American who authored ten or more pulp thrillers between disasters at the Bay of Pigs and the Watergate Hotel.) Where the CIA school of English plainly excelled MI6 was not in the creation of imaginative literature, but in the dependent arts of literary criticism and patronage; for a long, odd time, the CIA volunteered as an American “Ministry of Culture” (Rogin 16), or perhaps as a sneaky precursor of the National Endowment for the Arts.² The Paris-based Congress for Cultural Freedom, unmasked as a CIA front in 1967, fought its cultural Cold War by creating *Encounter*, a distinguished literary monthly originally edited by the Anglo-American odd couple of class-conscious poet Stephen Spender and neoconservative Irving Kristol. *Partisan Review*, founded as a Marxist little magazine in 1934, received cash infusions from the congress after refining an American concoction of high modernism and High Church anti-Stalinism (Wilford 103–5). The CIA may have indirectly paid for classic *Review* contributions by W. H. Auden, Saul Bellow, Elizabeth Bishop, George Orwell, Susan Sontag, and Wallace Stevens. By contrast, the half of T. S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets* published in the *Review* in 1940–41 arrived too early for Company sponsorship. Eliot’s imprimatur was nonetheless a crucial prize in another successful mission of the CIA school of English: the translation of the New Criticism into a prop of agent training and counterintelligence theory, the practical criticism of modernist poetry assimilated into modern espionage technique. Not for nothing would Allen Ginsberg, decades after accosting Walt Whitman in a California supermarket, fantasize about buttonholing Eliot on the fantail of a boat to Europe, and asking “What did you think of the domination of poetics by the CIA?” (Ginsberg 61).

The Company’s domination of poetics, such as it was, was facilitated by an Ivy League bastion older than the United States, a Collegiate Gothic hub where the networks of American academic and state intelligence overlapped almost seamlessly. A statue of patriotic martyr Nathan Hale, “the first American spy,” greets employees on their way to work at the CIA’s Virginia campus. It is cast from an original on the Old Campus at Yale University, placed there to honor Hale’s old school tie (he was an early Yale graduate) and, less officially, the shared coordinates of Langley and modern New Haven (Winks 15). “Somehow,” observes Yale historian Robin W. Winks, “the idea of Yale as a place, and of intelligence work as an activity, became linked, if not by Hale, then by the events of World War II” (15). Winks’s figures on the migration of Yalies into the World War II spy business reveal his “somehow” to be somewhat disingenuous.

Yale’s class of 1943 alone contributed forty-two BAs to the payrolls of U.S. espionage, most going to “the OSS, many to remain on after the war to form the core of the new CIA” (Winks 35).

The lead recruiter of the flood of Yale spies was a tenure-track English instructor trained in New Haven, a Massachusetts Yankee with a tubercular hip named Norman Holmes Pearson. A 1941 Yale PhD whose dissertation annotated Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Italian Notebooks*, Pearson welcomed his American-abroad assignment to London and the “X-2” division of the OSS. Behind its seductively vacant name, X-2 functioned as the counterintelligence division of the OSS, a unit with the recursive duty of countering threats to friendly intelligence operations—to adapt a phrase from part 2, call it the task of spying on the spies likely to spy on you. X-2 played a supporting role in the greatest Allied espionage triumph of the war, the application of broken German codes in an intricate “Double-Cross system” that transformed Nazi spies into deadly double agents.³ What Pearson cited as the foremost independent accomplishment of X-2 was a bookish, Hooverite one, however, the OSS-FBI rivalry be damned. Applying his research skills beyond the Yale library, Pearson built a comprehensive, Bureau-type card index system on 300,000 Axis intelligence threats. With assistance from this paper weapon, the OSS “contributed to the apprehension of 1,300 enemy agents in military zones alone and was primarily responsible for rendering ineffective German ‘stay-behind’ networks—intelligence groups left to be overrun as the Allied troops advanced, then to work from behind the Allied lines” (Winks 265).

The X-2 card catalog was nerdy-serious business, the unduplicable contribution of the Yale-OSS “bad-eyes brigade” to the war against real fascism. Its lead author, a collector of Ezra Pound manuscripts and the eventual literary executor of the Imagist poet H.D., saw no reason why such archival work could not also support the innovations in espionage tradecraft suggested by the promodernist New Criticism. Back in New Haven, Pearson’s literary-critical practice had been shaping up as a pragmatic bridge between curatorial historicism and its formalist opposite. In his methodological peacemaking, he predicted the anticommunist gentlemen’s agreement between “historical descriptions that were resolutely capitalist and untheoretical” and “theoretico-critical descriptions that were formally unhistorical and apolitical”—a tacit alliance of methods beneath the Cold War hegemony of the American New Criticism (Epstein 68). Seen in its own time, Pearson’s peacemaking shrewdly cut the difference between his home department’s magisterial school of eighteenth-century studies and the modish interest in the new southern formalists, then qualifying for Yale job offers (Cleanth Brooks arrived first in 1947) by publishing *Understanding*

Poetry (1938) and other conquering New Critical textbooks. Pearson himself specialized in books for the classroom. Before OSS, he had coedited a two-volume *Oxford Anthology of American Literature* (1938) with a fellow Yale, poet William Rose Benét. This field-shaping resource, reprinted into the 1960s, began with prosaic, historically responsible excerpts from settlement chroniclers John Smith and William Bradford. (Pearson's OSS cryptonym was "Puritan," of course.) Yet the editors' introduction still insisted that all contents were chosen for "purely literary" reasons (Benét and Pearson v). Pearson's dedication to the mixing of the old historicism and the new formalism extended from the *Oxford Anthology* to the OSS.⁴ To supplement an intelligence brain trust brimming with Yale librarians (e.g., Herman W. Leibert) and textual critics (e.g., W. S. Lewis, the editor of Horace Walpole's many letters), he recruited an entrepreneurial English major whose familiarity with the New Critics surpassed that of his professors. Pearson's student James Jesus Angleton, the Yale man who evolved into one of the most fictionalized spies in American history, received his BA at New Haven in 1941, the same year that John Crowe Ransom published *The New Criticism*, the book that certified the movement's family name. Briefly posted to the Harvard law school, Angleton set sail for the London office of X-2 in 1943.

Angleton, chief of CIA counterintelligence from 1954 to 1975, followed Pearson into the most secret of secretive intelligence specialties and was thus unable to speak unguardedly for decades. Fictional clones have been eager to do his talking for him, however. Gaunt, nearsighted, Angletonian characters addicted to poetry and cigarettes are legion in intellectually invested spy fiction, from Norman Mailer's *Harlot's Ghost* (1991), to William F. Buckley's *Spytime* (2000), to Stieg Larsson's *The Millennium Trilogy* (2005–7).⁵ (Two of the Pound-quoting, nicotine-craving Angleton's actual nicknames at the CIA: "the Poet" and "Virginia Slim.") Ironically, Angleton first came to Pearson's attention by creating custom forums for public self-expression. While still an undergraduate, too busy reading and writing modernist verse to attend classes, he worked to raise a pair of little magazines from scratch.⁶ The first was *Vif*, French for alive or quick, a plush journal for "those at American Universities who love the French language" (qtd. in Holzman, *James* 12). Angleton assumed the position of *Redacteur en Chef* by plying a background unusually cosmopolitan even among Yale Francophiles. Born in 1917 and raised, like Pound, in Idaho long enough to claim frontier American roots, Angleton had moved to Mussolini's Milan with his businessman father, who shipped him yearly to sub-Etonian English public schools. His mother, Carmen Mercedes Moreno of Mexico, contributed his middle name, Jesus, pronounced with a soft Spanish

"J," along with other reminders of a cross-border ethnicity that Angleton's wife alternately described as "Chicano," "Latino," or "Aztec," a non-WASPy trace her husband concealed at the Company (Holzman, *James* 8–9). (While Hoover may have feared that the head of the FBI was part black, Angleton knew that the chief of CIA counterintelligence was Mexican American. In both cases, expertise in double agency was energized by awkward private allegories of racial doubleness.) For *Vif*, Angleton wrote oracular French-language verse in offset fragments, imitations of "Mélange Adultère de Tout" (1920) and the rest of T. S. Eliot's francophone imitations of French symbolism. There may be a coded reference to interracial mélange in Angleton's overtly erotic poem "Caresse Primordiale" (1939), in which a "Trait de pinceau," or a trace of the paintbrush, reveals the impure fruit of knowledge (l. 1).

The fruit of Angleton's second act of journal raising is better remembered, praised from afar as "the *ne plus ultra* of little mags" (Victor Navasky, qtd. in Whittemore 339). If another American master spy edited a small-batch modernist poetry journal important enough to be reprinted for libraries in the 1970s, the proof is hidden.⁷ With assists from poet-classmate Reed Whittemore and a back-page ad from the *Kenyon Review*, Angleton unveiled the first issue of *Furioso* in the summer of 1939. Its intent was to ignore, furiously, the apprentice narcissism of the college literary magazine, and to create instead what Librarian of Congress Archibald MacLeish described without condescension as a "new magazine of Poetry" on *Furioso's* first-ever page (1). Ezra Pound, e. e. cummings, and William Carlos Williams were inveigled into the inaugural issue, drawn by Angleton's lecture invitations and the chance to offload material such as Pound's "Introductory Text-Book," four barely connected quotations from John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and George Washington, a rickety Mount Rushmore pointing to the coin and credit obsessions of *The Cantos*.

Before Angleton decamped to OSS, *Furioso* had printed fully cooked poems by Lawrence Durrell, Charles Henri Ford, Marianne Moore, Dylan Thomas, and Wallace Stevens. The two crucial English influences on the American New Criticism, William Empson and I. A. Richards, became repeat contributors and inspirational touchstones. Both Englishmen are reverently invoked in "A Primer for Modern Poetry," a review of Cleanth Brooks's *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (1939) that stands as a civil *Furioso* manifesto. "We hear a lot these days about the modern critical revolution," declared Andrews Wanning, Angleton's favorite Yale teacher, yet "the essence of that revolt lies in the discovery that it is possible and proper for a poet to mean two differing, or even opposing things at the same time" (23). The New Critical appetite for ambiguous meaning

became the consuming habit of *Furioso*. It bolstered Angleton's close friendship with Empson, the author of *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930), a logic-chopping deployment of intensive "verbal analysis" the future CIA officer hoped to republish with a New York house (Holzman, *James* 22). Though Angleton had no luck in persuading Empson to report for a Yale professorship during the Battle of Britain, he eventually succeeded in bringing the anatomy of ambiguity home to U.S. counterintelligence.

The utility of New Critical close reading in routine counterintelligence work is not, in truth, all that ambiguous. "Sensitivity to pattern is essential in detecting deception," submits William R. Johnson, one of the few CIA men to venture a signed primer for students of counterintelligence, or "CI," for short (9). This sensitivity is whittled to a fine point, he continues, in those "studying English poetry" (9), the New Criticism's somewhat parochial master genre. "It is no accident," insists Johnson, yet another spy-product of the Yale English department, that several of the best "CI officers in World War II were drafted into that war from positions as critics of English literature. They had been trained to look for multiple meanings, to examine the assumptions hidden in words and phrases, and to grasp the whole structure of a poem or play, not just the superficial plot or statement" (10). As a happy result, "the multiple meanings, the hidden assumptions, and the larger pattern of a CI case were grist for their mill" (10). In the event that "I catch [CIA trainees] studying Brooks and Warren's *Understanding Poetry*," Johnson confesses, "I do not instantly send them off to the firing range. I tell them to go read Cleanth Brooks on the 'language of paradox,' because CI is the act of paradox" (10). Johnson's commentary, an explicit drafting of New Critical brands and techniques into CIA service, is the sort that makes close reading seem redundant. The same man who led the Saigon CIA station as the final overloaded helicopter escaped the U.S. Embassy here recommends Cleanth Brooks for the Company syllabus, with the proviso that counterintelligence puts paradoxical language into paradoxical action. Postwar English majors, soaked in *Understanding Poetry* but itching to *do* something with their grasp of poetic irony, needed only to apply to Langley.

Johnson's confidence that multiple, contradictory meanings are the common coin of the literary critic and the counterintelligence agent incongruously stemmed from an anxious source. The little magazine boss-turned-espionage chief who recruited Johnson from academia to the CIA—none other than James Jesus Angleton—arrived earlier at the intersection of counterintelligence and New Critical paradox, searching for safe passage as his literary-critical orientation assimilated his anticommunism. Surveying the Soviet threat after World War II, Angleton developed the approach to counterintelligence that

provided the basis of Johnson's notion of CI as "the act of paradox." Nearly "in his own language," Angleton called this approach "the practical criticism of ambiguity," a phrase derived from the titles of two of the most influential texts of formalist criticism, Richards's *Practical Criticism* and Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (Epstein 84). According to William H. Epstein, the sharpest theorist of the secret agency of Cold War English studies, Angleton toiled throughout his CIA career to replicate the successes of the Double-Cross system, only to trip over fresh ambiguities with each practical step. Steering U.S. counterintelligence through the gloom of the Cold War, "he was never sure if he had a superior source, an unpenetrated agency, and a controlled network of double-agents" (85). Lacking these conduits of reliable counterespionage, even the most sanitary U.S. counterintelligence on enemy intelligence could not be ruled out as Soviet counterintelligence (or make that hostile Soviet "counter-counterintelligence," if the matter remains too clear). Cold War CI was therefore less a complex system of palpable double-crosses than a prismatic reflection of self and doubled-self, other and doubled-other, all identities subject to confusion with their opposite numbers. Spying on spies now required unnerving treks though "a wilderness of mirrors": so Angleton liked to put it, stealing a line from T. S. Eliot's poem "Gerontion" (1920), the mini-*Waste Land* and New Critical mainstay later recited at the CIA legend's funeral (Winks 327).

Given the collapse of counterintelligence certainties following the Good War and the Double-Cross system, Angleton's continued recourse to Richards and Empson first among the New Critics was far from arbitrary. Brooks and his southern American comrades tended to celebrate quasi-mystical, last-stand harmonies stabilizing structural tensions within the best-made English poetry. For example, in William R. Johnson's preferred Cleanth Brooks essay, "The Language of Paradox," otherwise known as the first chapter of *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947), the very distinction between scientific and poetic statements is premised on the latter's achievement of nonlogical "fusion," a final, intuitive welding "together [of] the discordant and the contradictory" (18). In distinction, Richards's *Practical Criticism* (1929) admits en route to its reformist pedagogical program that the "omnipresent ambiguity of abstract terms . . . may well appear to present insuperable difficulties for the speculative apprehension of the world" (322). Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930) ends closer to the creeping epistemological crisis where Richards, his Cambridge tutor, begins. The "most ambiguous" variety of ambiguity "that can be conceived," Empson pronounces, is a seventh and ultimate type in which "two opposite meanings defined by the context . . . show a fundamental division in the writer's mind" (192). In Empsonian ambiguity's purest form, the discordant

and the contradictory in language remain unsynthesized in the creator as well the beholder.

In Angletonian ambiguity, for its part, Empson and Richards's doubts about self-consistent meaning are amplified by the specter of Soviet infiltration of the sign, heightening the suspicion that ambiguity's empire could overcome the most studious spy-reader. Seen through Angleton's darkening lens, the contradictions of the CI wilderness of mirrors thus often remained insurmountably divided. Norman Pearson's compromise between historical positivism and southern formalism no longer dominated the way from Yale English to the profession of counterintelligence. Now required on the road between New Haven and Langley was a deregionalized New Criticism reattuned to tenacious ambiguity—ambiguity spotted in abstract language, in applied CI, in their many meeting points, in most everything but the unalterable moral difference between U.S. and Soviet camps. Defined anachronistically, CI under Angleton therefore felt its way past Pearson's compromise to a patriotic approximation of deconstructive criticism. Fiercely attached to the foundations of anticommunism yet persuaded of the relentlessness of semiotic difference, the Angleton way of reading pre-echoed aspects of a later formalist Yale School, the Americanized deconstruction of Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, Geoffrey Hartman, and J. Hillis Miller, all fascinated, too, with the restless deferral of unmixed meaning. By the late 1970s, humanist critics of Yale's deconstructive "Four Horsemen" had classified the quartet's accent on the undecidability of texts as a reinvention of Empson's wheel, a derivative eighth type of ambiguity. By the late 1980s, the discovery of de Man's anti-Semitic journalism had inspired defenders of the Yale School to advance desperate cases for deconstruction's inherent resistance to totalitarianism (Lehman 209–43). Whatever the wisdom of these intellectual shifts in Angleton's direction, his Empsonian and antitotalitarian anticipation of Bloom and company underscores the fluid border between New Critical and deconstructive concepts in practice.

The effects of Angletonian ambiguity on the daily operations of CIA counterintelligence are clearer. Angleton's reading of the pervasiveness of Soviet infiltration led to the extremes of the "Great Mole Hunt," a remorseless search for communist traitors inside the CIA. Before his suspicious hermeneutic was deposed, Angleton had accused most CIA Soviet division officers of selling themselves to Moscow; he had discounted the word of every actually existing Soviet defector and Soviet-turned-U.S. double agent. Even the break between Moscow and Beijing had been dismissed as a pseudo-reversal within a Soviet "master plot" (Weiner, *Legacy* 275–76). As judged by an in-house CIA historian, "the Poet" had descended into an unreliable narrator of "loose and disjointed"

scenarios, a thinker "whose theories, when applied to matters of public record, were patently unworthy of serious consideration" (qtd. in Weiner, *Legacy* 276). For all this, Angleton succeeded in retaining his position as the mastermind of CIA counterintelligence until the congressional revelations of 1975, the "Year of Intelligence" that J. Edgar Hoover died in time to avoid. The reign of the Poet happened to coincide with a twenty-year stretch in which, as far as we know, the CIA went unpenetrated by a single Soviet spy or U.S. turncoat (Weiner, *Legacy* 277). Even dangerously paranoid readers, it appears, can frustrate real enemies.

Reading Like an FBI Agent

Thanks to the shared seriousness of their anticommunism, James Jesus Angleton eventually became J. Edgar Hoover's best source and liaison at the CIA (Weiner, *Enemies* 177). None of his willingness to work with the FBI could have been predicted in the 1940s, however. While briefly hitting the books at Harvard Law, the young Angleton was visited by a G-Man hungry for enlightenment on the politics of high modernism. An "F.B.I. agent came to my study in Cambridge," the Poet informed e. e. cummings and his wife, Marion, in a manic 1943 letter (Angleton, letter). "Tell me all, [the agent] says," narrated Angleton. "Sir, I replied. Firstly I can rely upon my Constitutional rights and tell you nothing or I can deceive you or I can tell you all; but if I tell you all it will take a long time." "Tell all," the Bureau caller insisted, perhaps familiar with the lengths necessary to illuminate his subject of interest, Ezra Pound, then under investigation for radio diatribes on behalf of fascist Italy. Angleton obliged with a whirlwind tour of the less offensive highlights of the Pound era: "I take him from 1913 through all of Ezra's poetry—through the books of the Cantos explaining and declaiming. He writes in one notebook and then in several. I don't talk of Fascism or Jews—I talk of Jefferson and Social Credit, The New English Weekly, and America I love you. Thank you Mr. Angleton, he says, and looks hopelessly at his notebooks." In the afterglow of the tutorial, Angleton expressed a certain pity for the inferior critic-spy: "I only wanted to give you both sides of the picture, I said." Yet Angleton's recital hits its punch line in the comic inadequacy of the G-Man's response to word of Pound's complexity: "Poets are funny and art's a strange thing he replied and left" (29).

As it happens, the FBI agent's own record of his interview with Angleton has survived, and it is both less oblivious and less deferential to its source than Angleton could predict. According to Michael Holzman, Angleton's Bureau visitor was independently conversant enough to recognize that "the young law student

admired Pound's poetry, agreed with his political theories, but found the latter distorted by Pound's prejudices against Jews and International Bankers, thought the radio broadcasts that were the grounds for the treason indictment incoherent, and agreed both to testify and to name names" (*James* 30). Angleton's impression of the G-Man's clueless philistinism anticipates the CIA line on the tribe of "Fordham Bronx Irish." Yet it also manages to ignore all signs of a crafty intelligence behind an overt insensitivity—the possibility of a mask of puzzlement composed to elicit, say, a long, incriminating monologue on the poetic and economic bases of Pound's handcrafted fascism. An intermittently cagey critical intelligence tied to the hypothesis that "Poets are funny and art's a strange thing" is in fact a hallmark of FBI reading, the Bureau's generic alternative to Angleton's practical criticism of ambiguity.

In logical distinction to the New Critical drift of CIA reading, FBI reading shares a fair bit with the most relevant academic criticism of its pre-New Critical origin. And this academic criticism in turn shares its condition of emergence with the FBI's Radical Division, the incubator of *Radicalism and Sedition among the Negroes as Reflected in Their Publications*, the founding rock of Hooverite commentary on African American writing. The American university's study of American literature, Gerald Graff details, owed its start "in large degree to the impetus of . . . superpatriotism" circa 1918–20 (130). Fred Lewis Pattee, the self-described "Penn State Yankee" who may have been the first regularly appointed professor of American literature anywhere, recalled "a kind of educational Monroe Doctrine" emerging during World War I and its antiradical aftermath, a nationalist tropism, both expansionist and inward turning, demanding "for Americans American literature" (qtd. in Graff 130). In the thick of the fight, Pattee's own *Century Readings for a Course in American Literature*, an artifact of the Red Year of 1919, reasoned that

the new insistence upon the teaching of Americanism in our schools and colleges, especially in those that for a time were under government control, has brought the study of American literature into the foreground as never before. More and more clearly is it seen now that the American soul, the American conception of democracy—Americanism—should be made prominent in our school curriculums as a guard against the rising spirit of experimental lawlessness which has followed the great war, and as a guide to the generation now molding for the future. . . . [This textbook] is, if the compiler has done what he considers to be his duty, a handbook in Americanism." ("Introductory Note.")

Hoover's Radical Division library never replaced pilfered anarchist literature with reeducational copies of *Century Readings*. But Pattee's unintended echo of the Hoover library's well-publicized civic commitment—protecting "against the rising spirit of lawlessness which has followed the great war"—confesses an eccentric harmony between early FBI counterliterature and the earliest Americanist faculty. As Pattee suggests, literary-critical schools "under government control" possessed few instincts or resources with which to resist the teaching of Americanism through a foregrounded national literature. On land grant campuses such as Illinois, Michigan, and Pattee's Penn State, quads were refitted as troop training grounds, and required courses were redesigned as studies in war issues. At Berkeley, a dutiful great books class rematerialized as a massive outdoor lecture, "Books on the Great War" (Graff 129). Mobilized for the war effort, the higher literary learning rendered service as a semifederal bureau of patriotic aesthetics, like the FBI proper a state-sanctioned advocate of mental Americanism.

Which is not to suggest that the FBI proper failed to respect the increasingly professionalized, expert-centered habitus of the academic literary critics doing their duty to Americanize. In 1916, three years prior to Pattee's genteel enlistment in the Red Scare, the Modern Language Association (MLA), the leading professional association of U.S. college literature teachers, amended its constitution to emphasize the centrality of specialized "research in the Modern languages and their literatures" (qtd. in Graff 121; emphasis mine). The previous formula, emphasizing "study" in the modern languages, was dropped because of its inadequate aura of rigorous scientific investigation. By 1929, the MLA president proclaimed, ex cathedra, that "henceforth, our domain is research" (qtd. in Graff 121). The FBI, its scientific crime laboratory and degreed G-Men proud symbols of a parallel professionalization of U.S. criminology, could only applaud the MLA's shift. Quietly wading into the battle between expert literary scholars and knowingly amateurish "critics," FBI ghostreaders chose the side of literary fact over value, hard-nosed investigation over sensitive appreciation; when in literary-critical uniform, G-Men would be "research men" as well. Choosing sides among the ranks of the conquering scholars, meanwhile, Bureau critic-spies favored the emerging literary historians over the lingering linguistic philologists, the former more likely than the latter to join Pattee and other early Americanists in establishing the pedigree of modern U.S. texts, the Hooverites' major counterliterary target from the Harlem Renaissance through the Black Arts movement. While the philologists' ideal audience remained the multilingual *internationale* of letters, the then-new historians promised to contribute

“scientific consciousness and spirit” to the project of assessing American writing’s allegiance to the American conception of democracy (Morize 3).

The Bureau handbooks issued to novice G-Men integrated no excerpts from Harvard professor André Morize’s *Problems and Methods of Literary History* (1922), the standard manual for would-be professional literary historians between the world wars. Even so, first-wave Bureau ghostreaders give the impression of having memorized the methodological catechism of this “Guide for Graduate Students” (Morize i). “[T]hose who have faith in literary history,” Morize began, “ask merely that the critic . . . be sure to criticize established facts, indisputable chronology, correct texts, exact biographies” (2–3). The creative interpretation of modern U.S. texts, valued even by the buttoned-down FBI, was obliged to wait on the accurate assembly of the literary-historical record. The longest memorandum included in the very first FBI file on an Afro-modernist author, Claude McKay’s, thus establishes a definite, chronologically organized, heavily annotated bibliography of the subject’s oeuvre from the June 1921 article “How Black Sees Green and Red” to the August 1923 poem “May Day—1923” (U.S., Federal, McKay, 26 Jan. 1924). While it fails to compare minute differences in reprintings like a variorum edition, the same memo exactly transcribes four poems first printed in radical magazines: the FBI would unleash its networked counterliterature only against the “correct texts” of the enemy (26 Jan. 1924). Getting a “closing stanza” just right seems no less pressing than reproducing the red meat of a captured letter from the African Blood Brotherhood, Harlem’s groundbreaking Black Marxist sect (26 Jan. 1924).

While other habits of the McKay file were abandoned along the way, the effort to fix indisputable chronologies and exact texts remained key to FBI reading throughout the Hoover era. Ralph Ellison’s file, for example, offers a fuller bibliography of his apprenticeship as a Marxist author-editor than either he or most of his academic critics have been willing to pursue in the byways of the left press. For Bureau ghostreaders, *Invisible Man* is but one entry in a numerated literary record linking the procommunist Ellison of the Great Depression to the anti-“Brotherhood” Ellison of the Cold War: “2. The ‘Champion’ of Nov., [sic] 1937, page 3, reflects one RALPH ELLISON as a member of the Editorial Board. The ‘Daily People’s World’ of 12/15/54, page 7, reflects one RALPH ELLISON as the writer of an article,” and so on (U.S., Federal, Ellison, 29 April 1958). Richard Wright’s file and a few dozen others enhance an inclusive list of publications with multiple copies of the most influential. In addition to several separate facsimiles of the essay “I Tried to Be a Communist” (1944), creative nonfiction explaining Wright’s break with party discipline, his Bureau dossier takes in the whole issue of the *Atlantic* in which the piece first appeared. The soundness

of the many politically freighted restatements of Wright’s text could thus be checked against an original kept at the Seat of Government (U.S., Federal, Wright, 5 Aug. 1944). Langston Hughes’s file encompasses literary documents of a more collectable sort. Amid a big sea of red tape is the original text and setting of “Song of Spain,” a Hughes poem featured in the anonymously published *Harvard Communist*, ten cents a copy in the Depression year of 1937 (U.S., Federal, Hughes, 7 Oct. 1942). On the relatively few occasions when Bureau bibliography goes wobbly, the culprit is often the Cold War push for Total Literary Awareness. Amiri Baraka’s file accurately checklists his complicated small-press publication history until an overeager special agent blesses a tip that “‘The Black Bohemians: A Study of the Contemporary Negro Intellectual,’ is to be published soon” (U.S., Federal, Baraka, 30 Nov. 1964). Here, the Hoover-mandated craving for forward-leaning literary intelligence undermines the related desire for established literary-historical facts.

When early FBI reading leaps from the compilation of the literary record to the heights of interpretive criticism, it stops short of embracing the author-sidelining doctrine of the intentional fallacy and other features of the CIA–New Critical exchange program. Angletonian spy-reading, a distant influence on the likes of M. A. Jones and the G-Man reviewer of *A Raisin in the Sun*, begins to affect Bureau ghostreaders with the second Red Scare, the era when the CIA began to exceed the FBI in elite anticommunist cachet and the American New Criticism grew from Southern Agrarian credo to national collegiate champion. By contrast, the interpretive dimension of early FBI reading, a method born during the first Red Scare, reflects both the Bureau’s place atop a federal intelligence hierarchy free from Ivy League intruders and the biographical imperative of pre–New Critical historicism. Once “indisputable chronology [and] correct texts” were nailed into place, Morize instructed, the professional literary scholar was bound to turn to the building of “exact biographies” (2–3). “[T]he relation between a book and the personality of the author,” he explained, “is of necessity so close that a knowledge of the work presupposes complete acquaintance with the antecedents and the life of the writer” (210). Unlike some other Morizean seekers after biographical exactness, FBI readers did not deserve Cleanth Brooks’s charge that unreconstructed literary historians favored unironic “investigations of [the] ironic question, ‘What porridge had John Keats?’” (“Keats’s Sylvan Historicism” 153). But just barely.

The FBI file of Keats admirer Claude McKay, for instance, avoids inquiry into the Jamaican-born poet’s inspirational breakfasts but exhibits the brusque, gossip-hungry diligence of biohistoricism, the infatuation with the literary artifact imagined as an exotic confessional. Chosen from dozens of McKay

poems, the sonnet "America" (1921) is seen to deserve exacting transcription but is stripped of all rhetorical friction. A straightforward political moral—support your local America-hating alien—is thought clear as day and attributed to McKay the (political) man. Glossing "America," the poem, is thus the information that the poet arrived "at Ellis Island, New York, as a witness in behalf of . . . a British Communist" within months of its publication (26 Jan. 1924)—McKay's verse had failed the test of Americanism necessary for both FBI approval and canonization in Pattee's *Century Readings*. The affected principle of FBI interpretive theory debuts, loudly and explicitly, earlier in the same file. Given that the "[s]ubject is apparently a poet, or at least he has written considerable verse," McKay's "views, beliefs, principles, et cetera may properly be inferred from quotations from his writings" (26 Jan. 1924).

Avoidance of the "biographical fallacy" thus remained a task for CIA tradecraft, and the only thing New Criticaly ambiguated by the FBI's slant on McKay's sonnet was its author's patriotism. As early Bureau ghostreaders knew them, professional poets, or at least authors of considerable verse, were less rather than more liable than casual writers to avoid declarations of personal judgment. Contra Cleanth Brooks, a serious poem thus operated as an elaborate but candid profession of its author's faith, perhaps the furthest thing imaginable from a dramatic "speech, a consciously riddling paradox, put in the mouth of a particular character, and modified by the [work's] total context" (Brooks, "Keats's *Sylvan Historicism*" 154). As late in the day as the Larry Neal file, in fact, a poet's work as such—publishing quotable confessions of "views, beliefs, principles, et cetera"—was seen to render him or her especially "useful to the extremist cause in the event of a revolution" (U.S., Federal, Neal, 11 Jan. 1972). Even as Neal's file suggests the sympathy of some G-Men for the New Critical notion of the nonauthorial speaker, other ghostreaders submit the suspect's literary employment as sufficient reason for advanced "Category III" status in the latest version of the Security Index (11 Jan. 1972). When the FBI administered the final political Rorschach, poets would not be allowed to hide behind their dramatic characters.

By the 1950s, the twofold literary-critical language found in the Larry Neal file, both biohistorical and novice New Critical, would not seem exceptional in FBI reading. On the academic side of the fence, Norman Pearson's OSS-shaping compromise between Yale formalists and historicists had been reinvented as the predictable drift of U.S. English departments. Professorial "critics and scholars of the forties and fifties," Gerald Graff narrates, "reached an understanding that reconciled their conflict at a certain level: critics dealt with literary works 'in themselves' in an 'intrinsic' fashion, while historians dealt

with their 'extrinsic background.' More precisely, criticism and history were but aspects of a total activity of literary understanding, so that potentially any professor was both critic and scholar, and the sense of the necessary antagonism between these functions began to wane" (183). More and more FBI ghostreaders joined their academic colleagues in serving as switch-hitting critic-scholars: the Bureau agents assigned to produce works of COINTELPRO minstrelsy, for example, employed front-line extrinsic scholarship to author believable literary imitations, perhaps the closest form of close interpretation. Thanks to the nature of the "extrinsic background" postwar FBI ghostreaders researched when pursuing the scholarly side of their dual roles, however, very few would have won tenure prior to the mainstreaming of academic Marxism. With the blessing of FBI headquarters, they calculated quanta of ideology with a precision usually confined to students of Raymond Williams, Terry Eagleton, and Fredric Jameson.

FBI criticism reached its quasi-Marxist height after the Great Depression, the heyday of American literary communism. When self-consciously proletarian contributors to the *Anvil*, *New Masses*, and *Modern Quarterly* were reexamining their commitments in the wake of the 1939 Hitler-Stalin pact, FBI ghostreaders were only getting acquainted with the basics of radical aesthetics. It was not until the 1950s, in fact, that Bureau critics produced their best efforts to measure the politics of literature. Demystifying the political leanings of texts in every genre, FBI criticism then came to mirror that variety of Marxist literary analysis both closest to the concerns of mainline literary historicism (text X echoes political tendency Y) and most likely to devolve into political prescription (text X *should* echo political tendency Y). The pile of Bureau observations on the writing life of Frank Marshall Davis is a graphic case in point. When polishing his weekly fiction-and-opinion columns for the *Honolulu Record*, Davis, a Communist Party member since the 1940s, might have predicted a line-by-line hunt for fidelity to mainland communist policy. He would not have guessed, however, that the critical agency doing the hunting would be the FBI. A summary document by Honolulu special agent Leo S. Brenneisen includes four tight pages comparing lines from Davis's "Frank-ly Speaking" series with the "CP Line" supposedly engraved in the *Daily Worker* and the party's theoretical journal, *Political Affairs*. These file pages are neatly divided into two columns: excerpts from Davis fill the left-hand side with condemnations of white supremacy and nuclear testing in the Pacific, while apposite quotations from the communist press, matched paragraph for paragraph with Davis's arguments, fill the right (U.S., Federal, Davis, 14 May 1956) (see figure 3.1).

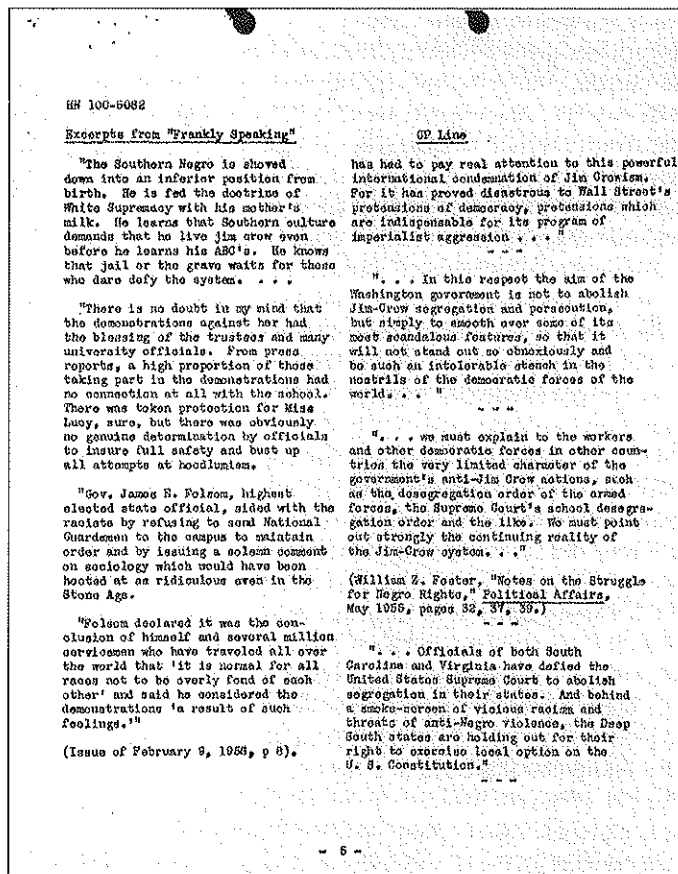


FIGURE 3.1: One from column A and one from column B: FBI ghostreaders graphically match the words of Frank Marshall Davis to the Communist Party line. (Courtesy of the FBI.)

Nowhere else is the notion of a writer's plagiarism of the party line presented so symmetrically.

Calvin Hernton's file offers something similar: an FBI informant's bluntly ideological assessment of the early poems "The Lynchers" and "The Poet," an interpretive exercise designed to override Hernton's protective unwillingness to "make any statements verbally which [might be] considered . . . outright revolutionary" (U.S., Federal, Hernton, 30 Aug. 1955). Reproduced line by line, irregular free verse margins included, Hernton's two poems are judged to be "revolutionary" and "somewhat revolutionary and certainly follow[ing] the

Communist Party line," respectively (30 Aug. 1955). Deep in the Cold War, FBI reading could thus resemble an efficiency expert's idea of a Marxist original. The Marxian strain in Bureau criticism was nonetheless capable of acknowledging a lack of communist inspiration. Among the last contributions to George Schuyler's file is a stand-alone review of one of his dismissive articles on the civil rights movement, "Road to Ruin." "The article starts in a provocative and prophetic manner," notes critic-spy F. J. Baumgardner, but ultimately fails to support the Bureau-favored claim that African American invective was "communist-inspired and directed" (U.S., Federal, Schuyler, 26 Sept. 1963). Even here, however, Baumgardner joins the makers of the Hernton and Davis files in assuming that the end of literature is to teach, delight, and convert. In the same postwar era in which FBI ghostreaders drew on New Critical lesson plans, they thus also opened themselves to the charges that New Critics aimed at literary Marxists, among the Bureau's sworn foes. G-Man readers steered free of Keats's porridge but probably earned a share of the blow Cleanth Brooks directed at "the Marxist critics [who] have merely revived and restated the didactic heresy," the sacrilege of reading for message over method (*Modern Poetry* 47).

In the last analysis, however, perhaps the most distinctive trait of FBI criticism had little to do with its catholic acceptance of both Marxist and New Critical prompts. The racial diversity of the modern American texts on which Bureau critic-spies practiced their craft distinguishes FBI reading from Brooks as well as from most of his whipping boys. More important here, this diversity also sets FBI reading apart from CIA reading under Angleton's sway. Thanks to the same black renaissance that the Bureau brought to the attention of federal authorities, occasional courses such as "Literature by Negro Authors" appeared in the catalogs of African American colleges beginning in the mid-1920s (Renker 92). The road to consistent self-study was slow, however. A 1933 survey commissioned by the *Journal of Negro Education* discovered only four black postsecondary schools in which specific courses on the Negro in literature were regularly staffed (92). In ironic contradiction, FBI reading emerged from the patriotic bonfire of 1918–20 eager to tackle African American writing. In this respect, if none other whatsoever, the FBI's various Book Review sections outpaced the language and literature programs of America's historically black universities. The Bureau's commentators on McKay and his New Negro comrades instead followed the lead of the more independent African American critics who advised Harlem's renaissance on its own metropolitan ground. When not seeking this renaissance's demise, FBI ghostreaders walked in the advanced path of Alain Locke and W.E.B. Du Bois, literary intellectuals hounded by the Bureau but as free as their Bureau antagonists from English department squeamishness over non-English pedigrees.

James Jesus Angleton, another English department escapee, brought Pound and Eliot, Richards and Empson, to bear on the CIA's "practical criticism of ambiguity." The FBI sampled both of the American poets above, plus the bulk of the interwar African American canon, when shaping its practical alternative. The result was a studiously political biohistoricism reflecting some of the basics of pre-New Critical academic criticism, yet adaptable enough for pluralistic retraining after World War II. Over the entire lifecycle of FBI reading, Hoover's critic-spies approached black texts with seriousness as well as malicious intent—and this when the many editions of Fred Lewis Pattee's *Century Readings for a Course in American Literature* neglected to include a single work by an African American author,⁸ and the vast majority of university critics of all backgrounds failed to dare any different. For all its offenses, the Bureau never misread African American literature as an invitation to relax critical standards. The ham-handed weaknesses and surprising strengths of FBI reading of this literature, an interpretive practice born in the first Red Scare and reborn in the second, were very like the strengths and weaknesses of FBI reading in general.