INTRODUCTION

"NOT LIKE AN ARROW, BUT A BOOMERANG," OR

The Lifecycles of Twentieth-Century African American Literary Papers

"I would hurl words into this darkness and wait for an echo," Richard Wright writes at the end of *Black Boy*, "and if an echo sounded, no matter how faintly, I would send other words to tell, to march, to fight, to create a sense of the hunger for life that gnaws in us all, to keep alive in our hearts a sense of the inexpressibly human."[1] What is all too easy to forget is that these rousing, now-famous words—words that have since reverberated loudly across the globe in multiple languages—lingered long in the shadows before sounding that first faint echo. For years they dried up likes raisins in the sun of Wright's archive until part 2 of *Black Boy*, known then as "American Hunger," at last appeared in print in 1977, seventeen years after the author's death and more than three decades after being hurled into this darkness. Perhaps as a reminder of its archival birth, the first edition closes with a reproduction of a page from the original typescript profuse with Wright's hand edits.[2] And finally in 1991, thanks to the Library of America's "restored text" edited by Arnold Rampersad, *Black Boy* appeared whole as the book we now know, teach, and love.[3] The hunger for life encoded in Wright's words was preserved in their creator's archive—that boxed site of enclosed darkness where words sit poised ready to tell, to march, and to fight for another day.

So fraught with absences, removals, and delayed restorations is the history of the black literary archive that it could perhaps best be described, after the poets Langston Hughes and Kevin Young, as a kind of "montage

of a dream deferred" forming a vast, collective "shadow book."[4] In *The Grey Album*, Young proposes a triadic taxonomy of "shadow books": the unwritten, the removed, and the lost. He suggests that the legion books by African American authors that "fail to be written" symbolize "the life denied [them], the black literature denied existence."[5] We nevertheless journey to black authors' special collections to "search among the fragments of a life unlived," hoping to map out the counterfactuals that history refused to accommodate. Archives are where we attempt to mend the split lives of books whose original releases, like *Black Boy*, "involve textual removals."[6] For scholars, the preservation of the removed is precisely the condition upon which genetic criticism depends: the alternative versions and abandoned drafts retroactively cast their shadow back upon the maimed books that survived. By disrupting textual stability, special collections further encourage "a willingness to recognize the unfinished" as a condition of the literary—not only what has been removed but also what the removed may one day inspire.[7] The paradox here—namely, that future presence is born out of past absence, that anything saved serves only to remind us of all that was lost—forms the archivescape of African American literature. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given his latest role as the director of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at the New York Public Library (NYPL), Young's extended reflections on shadow books ultimately bring him to the archive; such lostness, he concludes, is the reason he became not only a poet but also a collector and curator, "to save what we didn't even know needed saving."[8]

This book argues that such an archival impulse is the invisible hallmark of twentieth-century African American literary practice. The word *archival* bespeaks an underlying notion that documents have an afterlife, that they can be put to new, unpredictable uses and form the basis for new interpretive and narrative acts. For this reason, I define the archival as a pastness to come—*un passé à venir*. Such a temporality is suggested by Ralph Ellison's famous definition of *hibernation* in *Invisible Man* (1952) as a "covert preparation for a more overt action," which may serve as an accurate definition of black archivism. As I discuss in more detail, this is a double hibernation: first, it occurs during the creator's lifetime of preserving and

subsequently (re)deploying his or her records, and, second, it occurs in posthumous revelations. The archive is never an end in itself—otherwise we might as well call it a dumpster—but rather a speculative means to possible futures, including unknowable teleologies guided by unborn hands.

The case of Richard Wright, widely considered to be the first African American writer to enter mainstream American literature, is particularly telling because the bulk of his oeuvre comprises shadow books. Although Wright lived a relatively short life, dying in Paris in 1960 at the age of fifty-two, he left behind many more shadow books—along with some haikus—than books he was able to publish in his lifetime. And even those he was able to witness come into the world did so under difficult circumstances. His preeminence as an internationally recognized American writer imbued his unpublished works with an immediate aura of interest, despite what many of his contemporaries saw as his postexile "decline." Wright was thus one of the first African American writers whose archive was targeted for posthumous recuperation and reclamation. First came *Eight Men* in 1961—a collection of short stories Wright had begun preparing for publication—followed by what is now regarded as one of his best novels, the naturalist-modernist hybrid *Lawd Today!* (original title: *Cesspool*), completed in 1935, rejected everywhere, but finally published in 1963 by Walker and Company—although this first edition was filled with inconsistencies and unwarranted changes. In the decades that followed and up to *A Father's Law* in 2008, more Wright kept turning up, including *American Hunger* in 1977 and the young-adult novella *Rite of Passage* in 1994. Still waiting for an echo in the darkness of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University is the notorious "Island of Hallucination," an unfinished sequel to *The Long Dream* (1958), where the protagonist, Fishbelly, finds himself caught, much as his creator was, in a paranoid haze of CIA surveillance, betrayal, and international fascism.

Beyond the release of these previously unseen works, Wright's prolific posthumous publishing record points to another of the utilitarian hallmarks of literary archives—namely, the establishment of authoritative or corrected editions. When the Library of America brought the complete *Black Boy* out of the shadows in 1991, it was also able to restore Wright's underappreciated

novel *The Outsider* (1953). The editor with whom Wright had worked at the time had failed to understand Wright's novelistic project—he wanted Wright to eliminate the discourse against fascism that lies at the heart of the novel—and tried to turn it into a murder mystery. As a result, the publisher, Harper & Brothers, deleted an entire section and removed a number of paragraphs throughout the manuscript, amounting to more than 16 percent of the original.[9] In language that reflects the way in which working in personal archives often leads us to feel as if we are dealing with the living proxy of the deceased, Arnold Rampersad, the editor in charge of the monumental Library of America volumes, explains that he "tried to give him [Wright] back his book" by following "Wright's last typescript that he submitted to the publisher" rather than relying on the first published edition.[10]

Yet that's not all; the case of Richard Wright further introduces another central concern of this book—namely, the unheralded labor of archivists. Rampersad's editorship also gave us at last, in 1991, the unexpurgated version of Wright's first and most famous novel, *Native Son* (1940), another shadow book made whole thanks to the fortuitous preservation of the novel's page proofs in Wright's papers at Yale Library. These proofs, however, which represent the final version of the book before the Book-of-the-Month Club's deletions, were "overlooked by scholars," the *New York Times* reported at the time, because they had been "catalogued in an unusual way."[11] This final detail, where the archivist's hand suddenly materializes, is an important reminder of the invisible labor that makes so much of archival literary scholarship possible. As the *Native Son* example shows, the manner in which an author's material is cataloged can make all the difference in the world. Thus, understanding—or, rather, failure to understand—how cataloging works can objectively mean the difference between finding something or leaving it in the shadows.

Indeed, this brief history of the Library of America Wright volumes exposes much of what is at stake in literary papers as a whole: the writer's perceived value on the rare book and manuscript marketplace (determining who acquires their papers and who can afford them); the myriad delays that define anything archival and the widespread revisionist consequences that come in the archive's sluggish wake (for reception history, canon

formation, authorial biographies, and so much more); and the internal processing of the papers (the journey from acquisition to access that the records undertake within a repository). In other words, as Lisa Stead puts it, literary papers "offer us interrelated knowledge about the practices of editors and publishers and the power relations between writers and these figures and institutions."[12] Indeed, literary papers and the worlds they bring together—personal records and private estates, institutional libraries and the marketplace, archival science and copyright law—have increasingly determined the conditions of possibility for the future of literary study. For this reason, grasping the ways in which archivists have handled and conceived of literary papers since the midcentury boom is critical.

THE LIFECYCLES OF RECORDS

Upon its release in 1956, Theodore Schellenberg's manual *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques* was immediately hailed as a new guiding light for the archival profession. *The American Archivist* called it "the most significant and useful statement yet produced on the administration of modern records and archives."[13] By consolidating methods and experiences developed "in the brief span of 20 years since the creation of the National Archives Establishment [*sic*]" in 1934—archives that were founded amid a growing panic that important federal records were then "kept in various basements, attics, abandoned buildings, and other storage places with little security or concern for storage conditions"[14]—Schellenberg's manual became proof of "the advanced stage reached by the rapidly maturing profession of archivist in the United States."[15] The incumbent authority in archival practice and thinking, Hilary Jenkinson, whose work had held strong influence in the field ever since the publication of *Manual for Archive Administration* in 1922, had been surpassed. So much for the "old fossil," as Schellenberg called Jenkinson.[16]

One of Schellenberg's most enduring contributions to modern records management is the "lifecycle" concept, which appears early in the manual.

After briefly explaining that effective records managers should optimize the ability of records to "serve the purposes for which they were created as cheaply and effectively as possible" and then should make "proper disposition of them after they have served those purposes," Schellenberg writes:

> Record management is thus concerned with the whole life span of most records. It strives to limit their creation, and for this reason one finds "birth control" advocates in the record management field as well as in the field of human genetics. It exercises a partial control over their current use. And it assists in determining which of them should be consigned to the "hell" of the incinerator or the "heaven" of an archival institution, or, if perchance, they should first be held for a time in the "purgatory" or "limbo" of a record center.[17]

This remarkable passage operates as a veritable petri dish of postwar anxieties over reproductive rights, population control, genocide, and eschatology. Even though archivists are here portrayed as a "prochoice" collective, Schellenberg's account nevertheless casts the archive in pseudotheological terms as "heaven," the site of an everlasting afterlife. Record managers stand as gatekeeping celestial Lutherans on the threshold of life and death, imposing limits on the number of births and decreeing salvation or damnation for those who have come to the end of their days. It would also be hard to miss the disturbing connotations of the invocation of "human genetics" and the "incinerator," coming a mere decade after revelations of concentration camps, mass killings, and the accompanying eugenics experiments in Nazi-occupied Europe. Despite its attempt at playfulness, Schellenberg's analogy retains the cold touch of the gloved clinician. Over the years, the curiously anthropomorphic concept of a record's "lifecycle," which has come to designate the different roles and phases through which documents pass before being "disposed of,"[18] has grown into an integral part of records administration.

The lifecycle concept has become common shorthand for the dynamics of records: their provenance, purpose, and telos. Elizabeth Shepherd and Geoffrey Yeo, the authors of an oft-used manual in library science,

Managing Records: A Handbook of Principles and Practice, explicate the lifecycle model as an indication "that records are not static, but have a life similar to that of biological organisms: they are born, live through youth and old age and then die. . . . Most models aim to show a progression of actions taken at different times in the life of a record: typically, its creation, capture, storage, use, and disposal."[19] Of all these terms, the most conspicuous is undoubtedly *capture*, which bears the taint of covert Cold War espionage and containment, a feeling reinforced by its definition as almost a form of informant hostage taking: the steps "taken to secure a record into an effective records management system, where the record can be maintained and made accessible for as long as it is needed."[20] What *capture* really means is that a record's information must be inscribed or seized in some kind of storage medium—in that sense, "a record is 'captured' on paper as soon as it is created," but this piece of paper then needs to be pulled into a records-management system—which still requires a physical infrastructure—in order to be used and controlled. The same goes for born-digital records, which are saved on various digital formats that require both hardware and software.[21]

To the linguistically alert, such language of capturing and securing—the language of records management—is redolent of the war-torn politics out of which the field emerged and expresses the instrumentalism of late capitalism. In particular, the paradoxically dehumanizing overtones of the lifecycle analogy are encapsulated by the graph in figure 0.1, which, though innocently offered by Shepherd and Yeo as a visual illustration of the lifecycle model, adopts unsettling connotations when considered in light of its postwar institutional context.

It is difficult to entertain the anthropomorphic conceit of the lifecycle concept without considering the histories of actual lives reduced to disposable property—from concentration camp inmates to chattel slaves —created only to be captured, stored, maintained (fed, housed), used, and discarded once used up. Given these subtexts, it is not surprising that some of the most robust recent theorizing of the archive writ large has come from Jewish and Holocaust studies, African American studies, and postcolonial history. These fields, exemplified perhaps by the work of Giorgio Agamben,

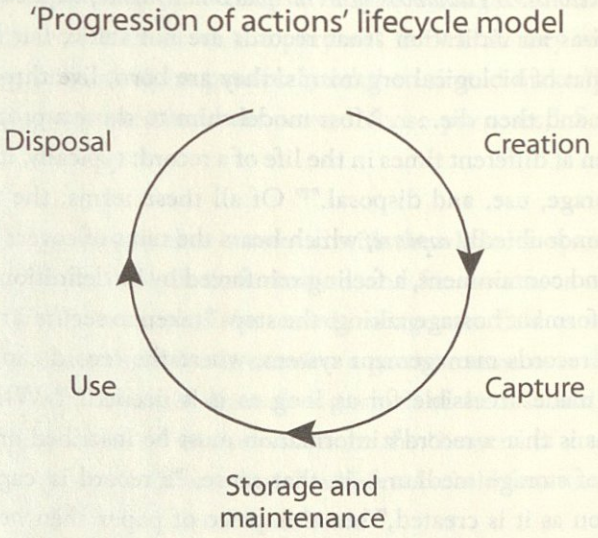

FIGURE 0.1. An ominous lifecycle.

Source: Elizabeth Shepherd and Geoffrey Yeo, *Managing Records: A Handbook of Principles and Practice* (London: Facet, 2003), 6.

Saidiya Hartman, and Ann Laura Stoler, forcefully remind us of the many literal lives behind the official record, whether they be subjects or administrators.[22]

Treating documents as alive can troublingly blur the line between property and the living, but this same metaphor can also underscore the ethical stakes of their use. As recent scholars of coloniality and the police state—Ann Laura Stoler, Michel Foucault, and William Maxwell, to name a few—have taken pains to remind us, the cold, administrative records found in colonial, prison, and intelligence-agency archives are the product of imperfect, fallible human hands, functionaries with "epistemic uncertainties," just as the fading traces of long ago prisoners, or "cargo"—as in NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!*[23]—are remnants of lived lives, scars *en relief* of once vibrant beings. "[The archive] is proof that a life truly existed," Achille Mbembe writes, "that something actually happened."[24] In the face of such

a clinical lifecycle system, humanist practices remind us that archived lives matter.[25]

African American studies holds an indelible archival relation where the living present is forever marked with what Salamishah Tillet calls "sites of slavery," a sentiment further echoed recently by Christina Sharpe in her book *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*.[26] Emerging in the wake of the omnipresent vanishing point of slavery, African American criticism fuses archival theory and practice in thinking together afterlives, resilience, tradition, materiality, loss, translation, absence, recuperation, and civic engagement. The forensic imagination that informs much of contemporary African American scholarship (re)establishes the authority of a collective provenance, conjuring a kinship that, at its best, allows contemporary black life to imaginatively reclaim irretrievable losses. At the same time, as Hartman's "critical fabulation" makes clear, such retrieval, let alone epistemology or any notion of certainty, remains impossible. The black diasporic archive operates both within and beyond this paradigm; it grounds itself in the material as much as in the immaterial—accumulating paper and phantasms with relish and dread. Put another way, black archivism is another material means through which Amiri Baraka's elusive "changing same" comes into being.[27] In part because many African American authors lived with a constant threat of annihilation and in part because of a forced self-reliance, they deliberately developed an archival sensibility whose stakes were tied to both politics and aesthetics, to both group survival and individual legacy.

Motivated at once by private self-construction and public-minded group unity, the conscious building of black literary archives defines the midcentury period between the New Negro movement and the Black Arts Movement. Practiced under inimical conditions, this rising archivism may in fact be the clearest bridge between the two movements we so often keep apart, the tunnel that runs under the great American library. Thus, deep immersion in the idiosyncratic collecting practices of individual authors offers a unique counterpoint to the dominant forms of institutional thinking under whose shadow black writers lived. The archive becomes a site where an author's hidden identities, affiliations, and political ambivalences and

fantasies can be hammered out, notably when these things were deemed too difficult, messy, shameful, or inchoate for public presentation. In this respect, an author's private archival practices foreground alternative forms of curation that remain simultaneously political and aesthetic.

As I trace in more detail in chapter 1, over the past hundred years an intergenerational consideration—a kinship across time reaching back to a common ancestry in Africa and hurled forward into a speculative future—distinguishes the archival practices of African American authors from purely mainstream desires for individual legacy or the lure of wealth and posthumous fame. That said, there is no question that a certain amount self-interest, indeed, self-love—an unshakable belief in one's own value and importance—is a necessary aspect of the self-archiving life, and thus the prominence of one's chief allegiance—to the group or the self—depends on the author in question. To take a literary example, when the troubled queer artist Paul commits suicide at the end of Wallace Thurman's novel *Infants of the Spring* (1932), he carpets "the floor with sheets of paper detached from the notebook in which he had been writing his novel," imagining that this dramatic flourish—pages found surrounding the bloody final bath of its author—would create enough "delightful publicity to precede the posthumous publication of his novel." Thurman's narrative criticizes Paul's failure to take "into consideration the impermanency of penciled transcriptions" as the pages are "rendered illegible when the overflow of water had inundated the floor, and soaked the sheets strewn over its surface."[28] Literary glory after death can come only to those who have taken the time and care to understand the brittle nature of the materials they work with and have pursued proper steps for long-term preservation.

By merging the dominant concept of "afterlives" in African American studies with the archival notion of records going through a series of "lifecycles," this book seeks to sustain an ethical grounding for the narration of history. Amid this literary study, I want to suggest that our methods of historicizing have in part been dependent on an archival lifecycle discourse in ways that have yet to be fully addressed. Indeed, from an archivist's perspective, much of Mbembe's oft-cited essay "The Power of the Archive

and Its Limits" seems to emerge unwittingly out of the lifecycle discourse. For instance, Mbembe writes that "it is only at the end of this period of closure that the archived document is as if woken from sleep and returned to life. It can, from then on, be 'consulted.'" He concludes his essay with a paraphrase of the lifecycle model that archivists—and historians—have been using for decades: the use of an archive "results in the resuscitation of life, in bringing the dead back to life by reintegrating them in the cycle of time."[29]

Although the lifecycle model is a crucial and contentious context for the "archival turn" in literary studies, it remains useful in and of itself as a means of understanding the work that archives do. Despite being the target of some important critiques—notably the alternative "records-continuum" model—the lifecycle concept has largely been embraced by the archiving profession.[30] In fact, the current website of the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), "America's record keeper," cites the lifecycle concept as key to its methods. When answering the age-old question "What's a record?" NARA follows its general mission statement with a detailed breakdown of the lifecycle model under the title "Records Have 'Lifecycles.'"[31] This breakdown is part of a series of educational capsules grouped under the simple rubric "ABCs About Archives." Roughly speaking, first, the "record is created, usually for a specific purpose, presumably for a legitimate reason and according to certain standards."[32] The record is then "active" and has what archivists call "maximum primary value." Once this initial activity is no longer necessary because its primary purpose is achieved, the record usually develops a related use (say, consultation) and is still kept on site but might not be used every day. After a time, the record creator must decide how to dispose of the record—a phase often called "appraisal": Should it be destroyed, or do we deem it to have "long-term, indefinite, archival value" and store it for posterity? Once stored—or "archived"—the record acquires what some archivists call "secondary value," a concept that was developed to distinguish between the types of purposes and context in which a record was first created and used and the new kinds of uses that same record can unpredictably acquire over time. NARA

officials, the website states, "help documents through this process"—that is, through life. In other words, archivists are the life coaches of civilization's undead.

The NARA's lifecycle model primarily concerns bureaucratic documents, however, so when it comes to literary documents, the lifecycle concept becomes much more complex—indeed, literary archives have always presented peculiar challenges to the traditional ways archivists do business. Literary records may adopt a multiplicity of lives over an extended career—all the while remaining in the hands of a single creator. When we handle literary artifacts, we may never know how many lives they have already had.

Nor can we know how many they may have again. This book aims to bring into relief the unique powers and functions of writers' archives through meticulous excavation of previous lifecycles of key literary artifacts preserved in the papers of pioneering African American novelists who collectively helped to inaugurate an important midcentury shift in black literary collecting practices. In tracing the underappreciated archival sensibility of these novelists—namely, Claude McKay, Richard Wright, Ann Petry, and Ralph Ellison—this book demonstrates how these writers first preserved then reanimated their own living collections through novelistic practice. "In the beginning was not the shadow but the act," Ralph Ellison writes in his first book of essays to underscore how "all those acts, legal, emotional, economic and political, which we label Jim Crow" are the ontology upon which the shadow can be constituted. Indeed, if I may be allowed a counterintuitive *détournement* of Ellison's concept, without those acts of preservation, precarious performances laden with "legal, emotional, economic, and political" weight, there would be no resultant shadow archives out of which to reclaim and reaffirm. As Ellison puts it, the "digging up of corpses"—in this case literary ones—is a necessary part of the "process by which the role of Negroes in American life" can be newly demonstrated.[33] At the same time, this book is invested in how the novelistic valuation of wayward documents, now held in multiple repositories, has come to form the shadow archive of American literature.

In the remaining part of this introduction, I outline the book's key argumentative terms, stakes, and literary case studies, and then in chapter 1 I offer a historical survey of the rise of twentieth-century African American manuscript collections in the context of the wider growth of contemporary literary papers. Subsequent chapters serve as case studies, what Carlo Ginzburg calls "micro-histories,"[34] uncovering the multifaceted literary means by which authors redeploy their records, whether through revision, insertion, falsification, translation, redaction, remediation, or even simple fictionalization, sometimes across vast expanses of time. As investigative deep dives into the papers of specific writers, these chapters call for a radical reassessment of an author's overall oeuvre while at the same time serving as practical scenarios for negotiating literary archives in contemporary scholarly practice.[35] To this end, my chapter on Ann Petry departs from the tone and structure of the other chapters to expose the kind of prelabor that the longer, interpretive scholarship necessitates. Framed as a first-person account of an archival quest, punctuated by interruptions and a dearth of materials, this "interlude" chronicles the difficulties of locating and working with the papers of a fiercely private author who actively destroyed much of her archive. The chapter stands as a representative example of the many reasons why the papers of black female authors are so few in number and remain neglected even by the repositories that own them. At the same time, I narrate how the evidence gathered in the Ann Petry Collection at Boston University began to mysteriously point to another, undisclosed manuscript collection at Yale and the research efforts I undertook in my fevered attempt to find it.[36]

In the same spirit, this book concludes with a methodological reflection on the discovery and subsequent authentication of Claude McKay's novel *Amiable with Big Teeth*, the "lost" shadow book that launched this project many years ago. Chapter 4 and the coda thus mean to break the "fourth wall" of the scholarly monograph to address crucial questions of method and access that are too often concealed behind the glossy, finished academic product. The juxtaposition of three interpretive chapters alongside two methodological pieces aims to expose the ways in which these distinct forms

of scholarship—what Jerome McGann calls "lower" and "higher" criticism, terms used to differentiate textual scholarship or philology from hermeneutics and "interpretive procedures"[37]—demand different kinds of intellectual and physical labor yet nevertheless mutually inform and reinforce each other. This book is thus an attempt to return to a more capacious way of engaging with literary artifacts by offering both an "analysis of the textual transcriptions" and the "sociohistory of the documents."[38] It is in part an answer to the call Lisa Stead makes in her introduction to the anthology *The Boundaries of the Literary Archive: Reclamation and Representation*, where she proposes that what literary scholars actually "do in the archive—physical or virtual" should "be positioned alongside (and in dialogue with) the conclusions, revelations and formulations we take out of the archive."[39]

PROLEPSIS: ARCHIVAL DELAY AND "SECONDARY VALUE"

Twentieth-century black counterarchiving is illustrative of a shifting postwar democratic landscape that continued to lag in ascribing value to black lives; it stands as a pledge to a speculative posterity that such archives would one day help make a reality. In the sense Derrida outlines in *Archive Fever*,[40] shadow archivism is at once a promise and a "wager" that the generation of the New Negro movement, perhaps best symbolized by Arturo A. Schomburg's personal collection, effectively made amid continued inequality. Of course, for African American authors, delay not only is built into the temporality of the archive but is also a structural facet, if not the architectural logic, of freedom and equality across the twentieth century. As the now infamous phrase from the *Brown vs. Board of Education* (347 U.S. 483 [1954]) Supreme Court decision puts it, desegregation comes "with all deliberate speed," vague words that were used to justify deferment across the U.S. school system.

Yet, in a more prosaic sense, the strange temporality of literary papers is also an inevitable result of the delay that comes with the author's active

years, subsequent demise or death, and the final acquisition of those papers by an institution—which then has to process their contents (what is called "physical control" in archival science) and prepare the front matter (a process called "intellectual control") in order to make the papers accessible to users. As a result, many midcentury authors are being rediscovered in the new millennium as the majority of their papers finally become ready for the public. In one very real sense, *archive* is a synonym for *delay*. Yet, in another way, as Toni Morrison suggests in *Beloved*, the archive reminds us that "everything" is contemporary: "It is all now."[41] Literary papers are unwieldy, sprawling, even postmodern texts that unhinge our sense of the past and force us to reinterpret, redescribe, and rewrite whole biographies. The date an archive is made available to researchers acts upon literary studies like the release of a previously unknown work by the author—and, in a way, it is.

Brent Hayes Edwards's use of the French term *décalage* in *The Practice of Diaspora* brings a resonant set of connotations to the prolepsis that defines the archive's intervention. As Edwards points out, *décalage* has many subtle meanings but broadly refers to a "gap" or displacement in time or space or both, one implying an "interval," and it is commonly the term French speakers use to translate "jet lag,"[42] even though the full French phrase meaning "jet lag" is *décalage horaire*. *Horaire* literally means "schedule" but in this case refers back to *fuseau horaire*, the French term for "time zone," an English phrase that pithily fuses time and space together. Spatiality is chiefly what interests Edwards in the practice of diaspora; he clarifies his use of the term *décalage* through the meaning of its inverse, *caler*, which, he says, means "to prop up or wedge" something in space in order to restore or give it an evenness. Equipped with this European significance for *caler*, Edwards elegantly suggests that *décalage*, as the opposite of *caler*, thus "indicates the reestablishment of a prior unevenness or diversity; it alludes to the taking away of something that was added in the first place, something artificial, a stone or a piece of wood that served to fill some gap or to rectify some imbalance."[43]

For a French Canadian reader such as me, Edwards's etymological exercise conjures further protean associations. In Québec, the verb *caler* holds

distinct additional meanings, the most common being to chug a beer in one swig (*caler sa bière*) and to be growing bald (*il cale*)—neither of which, admittedly, offers a very edifying vision of my people. But *caler* can also refer to the disappearance of the ice crust over a lake in the spring just as it can refer to the descent of an object into a liquid or some other porous substance (say, quicksand—but a common use among Québécois children is the equivalent of dunking cookies into milk). We can also say, "*Se caler*," which is something French Canadians do well: to be the architect of your own demise, to put yourself in a disadvantageous position or humiliate yourself, basically to dig yourself into a bigger hole. And *recaler*, of course, in Québec as in France, means to fail a test or flunk a year of school and in effect to be pushed back in time, forced to begin again. Here we reencounter the effects of *décalage horaire*, of jet lag: a disturbance to an arbitrary schedule, a scrambler of ordered time, implying the movement of an object or a lifeform from one time zone to another, all of which further inform how I understand the lifecycles of documents and how I approach the archival as a proleptic pastness to come.

The supplementary Québécois connotations of *caler/décaler* extend the joint movements authorized by Edwards's diasporic articulations, notably because of these movements' association with natural ecosystems as opposed to artificial constructs such as props and wedges: the melting of ice over a lake, the gradual loss of male cranial fur—both organic signs of the passing of time and mortality. Thus, if *caler* can also mean to submerge something until it is no longer visible, a process reminiscent of the archiving of documents, then in such a scenario *décalage* would be to retrieve the sunken record, to break though the icy crust of time and plunge one's arm in the depths (*fonds*), grab hold, and unwedge the desired fossil back above the surface. Rescued from this disadvantageous position, the fossil, its youthful head of hair regained, may begin its belated (*recalée*) life again. Or those that had never really started living can begin their lives in earnest.

In a way that is both tragic and inspiring, the posthumous—literally "born after death"—is an intimate and integral part of the history of African American letters, as this book's opening anecdote regarding

Richard Wright's oeuvre suggests. Many of the works penned by black writers—from *The Bondswoman Narrative* by Hannah Craft (written in the mid–nineteenth century but not published until 2002) to *Amiable with Big Teeth* by Claude McKay (written in 1941 but not published until 2017)—had to languish in darkness before seeing the light of day. In consideration of the *longue durée* trajectory of black special collections, I propose that African American authors developed a unique relation to preservation and archiving, one that hoped for release but planned for delay. As such, African American letters are suffused with a spectral poetics of anticipation that gestates in and through archivism. As one historian puts it, the "grammatical tense of the archive is thus the future perfect, 'when it will have been.'"[44] Shadow archivism is an Afrofuturist pledge—an affirmation made in the face of the "wreckage upon wreckage" of centuries of violence.[45] Despite a lack of futurity lived as a systemic lack of equal opportunity and partly in response to the institutional appreciation of literary papers, African American writers nevertheless began preserving and fashioning their own files in anticipation of an eventual acquisition. Such is how the archive moves: "Not like an arrow, but a boomerang," as Ellison says of history. This black boomeranging archival sensibility not only structures self-understanding and self-representation but also becomes the means through which ideas are thought and expressed. Sensibilities, after all, cannot be reduced to ideas, and each strikes its own sound, akin to a quarter tone vibrating in the interstices of the archive.

The creation of a document, its preservation by the author, and its repurposing into a new temporality, often through a new vessel (a novel, a story, an essay, a song, a photograph, a letter, a statue), suggest the ways in which literary archives are both "being and becoming"—a temporality that Margo Crawford persuasively ties to blackness or, rather, the "rhythm" of blackness in time in her recent book *Blackness Post-blackness*. Crawford's discussion of the serial "circularity of black aesthetic traditions" identifies, via Nathaniel Mackey and Kamau Brathwaite's idea of "tidalectics," a "tension between pacing back and forth with a sense of stasis (a 'failed advance') and pacing back and forth" as a staccato form of forward propulsion. For Crawford, this back-and-forth temporality lies at the center of the "black radical

tradition of continuity *and* rupture" that both defines her theory of black postblackness and marks the historical period between the Black Arts Movement and contemporary black aesthetics.[46] Crawford's meticulous unpacking of tidalectics as a bridge between moments in time that are both distant yet near, radically different yet so similar, may also stand as a model for the complexities of archival delay in African American studies. When an archived literary artifact washes up on the shores of the present, it inevitably brings something from the sands of the past, from the *fonds*; it washes over us toward a future thanks to the propulsive force—"in the wake," as Christina Sharpe puts it—of the old tide. Yet in archival tidalectics the past's landfall into the present further anticipates a new horizon upon which yet another wave will one day come to strike.

The future, unpredictable itinerary that archival documents travel while in the hands of novelists (or scholars), partaking of both the aesthetic and the political, lies at the heart of this book. Some form of peripatetic reactivation, "secondary value," or repurposing of a document is featured and unpacked in each of the chapters that follow—whether within the novelist's career or beyond his or her biological lifespan. Literary lifecycles become an intergenerational process that traces what Stoler calls the "*mutating* assignments of essence" in documents.[47] Stoler's phrase is yet another way of understanding what archivists mean when they use the shorthand term *lifecycle*: it refers to the protean and multitudinous functions all records possess, lose, regain, and adopt.

The "secondary value' is often regarded as a "second" lifecycle, a kind of afterlife, akin to a secular resurrection. Interestingly, this supplemental value appears to be perpetually latent; a record may lie dormant indefinitely until it is suddenly brought back to life by a new administration, a wandering scholar, an accidental traveler, or a conscientious archivist. "It's never too late!" is the archive's version of the modernist's "Make it new!" In a Benjaminian sense, excavating the dead conjures the messianic tradition—the occult relation, akin to a séance, fostered by the lifecycles concept. The "death of the author" is precisely what authorizes his or her revival—as Stephen Enniss points out, "The one person we most want to find in the

archive is, after all, the one person we can be sure we will not find." We nevertheless persist, in a desperately human desire "for some transubstantiation of pen and paper that may yet fill that unfillable space."[48] Though "the archive" is often used in the service of the disciplinary embrace of the institutional and quantitative, it would be foolish to deny the intensely affective, even otherworldly aspect of the "psychic link," to use David Greetham's phrase,[49] of the archival encounter. Beyond the messianic, the concept of "secondary value" further invokes the gothic or even a certain Herbert West reanimator. Much of genre fiction reminds us that the realm of the occult, which seeks to contact immaterial spirits lying in wait through ancient material vessels, is an archival practice. Far from representing the triumph of the empirical in literary studies, the archive therefore might hold sway in that discipline in part because of the way it taps into basic fantasies of immortality and offers a balm against the threat of loss and impermanence. In seeking the dry bones of evidence, we have, like Henry Dumas's Headeye, stumbled upon spirituality, even if we, too, prefer to deny it.

As Mbembe underscores, the "live" dialogue between past and present that the archive facilitates is privileged because it usually happens in specific, designated, protected locations that have "something of the nature of a temple and a cemetery."[50] His metaphors, rooted in voodoo, refer to places in genre fiction where priests or wizards can concentrate their powers through a nexus of ley lines or villains can revive the army of the dead with the *Necronomicon* and the blood of a king or a virgin—perhaps the most glaring difference being that we (Lisbeth Salander aside) can't go to an archive at night, under a full moon, but are forced to go there during business hours, (presumably) without vials of blood, and face bored security guards rather than otherworldly guardians of Asgard. And scholars of all kinds flock to congregate there, united in the heroic notion that they are "engaged in a battle against this world of spectres," perhaps without admitting the extent to which they are sharing in a spirituality that masquerades as "the inescapable materiality of the archive."[51] Let's turn, now, to how this materiality is made manifest.

THE ARCHIVESCAPES OF BLACK LITERARY PRODUCTION

In his oft-cited essay "In the Author's Hand: Artifacts of Origin and Twentieth-Century Reading Practices," Stephen Enniss, former head librarian of the Folger Shakespeare Library and now director of the Harry Ransom Center in Texas, estimates that one of the archival profession's "most dramatic success stories" has been the "growth of our institutions' literary collections in the century just past—and the increasing professionalization in our stewardship of them."[52] The story of this growth, sketched in chapter 1, reveals how entwined the fields of archival profession and literary studies are and how they have mutually influenced not only each other's pragmatic strategies but also each other's values and methods of appraisal. As Enniss puts it, the systematic swelling of literary collections has "helped to shape twentieth-century literary studies even as our practices of collecting have, in turn, been shaped by them."[53]

Literary criticism over the past decade has become richly attentive to the conditions that underwrite literary professionalization, yet the crucial role played by literary collections in "making this professionalization possible" remains obscure.[54] This obscurity is all the more surprising when we take into consideration the fact that the proliferation of literary archives represents an upheaval in American letters that rivals the spread of university creative-writing programs so skillfully exposed by Mark McGurl in *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing*.[55] From a historical standpoint, in the United States literary archives coalesced as a cultural and monetary value in the wake of modernism and the Depression and thus on the heels of New Deal reforms such as the Works Progress Administration as well as on the paradigm-shifting turn in archival science brought about by the publication of Schellenberg's manual *Modern Archives* in 1956. In the midst of such convergence, authors increasingly considered the status of their lives essentially as occasions for an archive.

The case studies in this book revolve around African American authors whose personal archives were forged precisely at this time when the literary

papers of established white writers emerged as a valuable commodity and as a means of refashioning the personal into cultural capital. Although the profitable commodification of black literary archives was delayed, black counterarchiving was already inscribed as part of a tradition and legacy of Afromodernism. Midcentury African American authors such as Claude McKay, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Gordon Parks, and Ann Petry, among others, were among the first adoptees of this institutionally informed archival sensibility; they acted as bridges to a past just as they pointed to a future beyond their grasp. As the pressure point that both transformed and transferred tradition, the mid–twentieth century stands as that liminal moment when the "indignant generation," to use Lawrence P. Jackson's phrase,[56] absorbed the triumphs and failures of the New Negro movement and established new methods of resistance that laid the groundwork for the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s.

Attending to the lifecycles of literary archives—the archaeological sediment of novelistic craft—can make visible both authors' aesthetic engagement with the novel form and their otherwise opaque political commitments. All of the novelists I consider incorporate archival concepts into their aesthetics—namely, use value, evidentiary truth, access, authenticity, provenance, and original order. Thanks also in part to the upheavals in paper-reproduction technologies, as Lisa Gitelman traces in *Paper Knowledge*, the midcentury was stamped with what Hal Foster calls an "archival impulse": to "make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present."[57] For African American novelists, the logic of such an impulse often proved to be a two-pronged affair: it manifested itself in their idiosyncratic archiving practices performed behind closed doors, and their novels frequently positioned "the often lost or displaced" at the very center of the story as a mirror of the black experience in the United States. This new focal point—plucked from the periphery—recuperates a slew of historical information that otherwise would remain invisible. Thus, new histories and lives become "physically present" at once in both literary and archival form.

These dynamics are precisely those I explore in chapter 2, where I trace the lifecycles of the "special research work" McKay did as part of the

Federal Writers Project to write his nonfiction book *Harlem: Negro Metropolis* (1940), work that he then later repurposed into novel form as the long-lost *Amiable with Big Teeth*.[58] The latter not only brings the Italo-Abyssinian conflict of 1935 to the foreground—an event largely "lost or displaced" by mainstream history—but further revives heroic African American figures in the service of group unity. McKay is also careful to ground his novel in key documents—an imperial letter, photographs, newspapers, and ledgers—and thus insists on a materiality that demands to be confronted and questioned. Similarly, I investigate a corresponding concern in chapter 5 when I turn to the important role played by dismissed ephemera such as comic books in Ellison's novel *Invisible Man*, a relation I explore through a genetic analysis of Ellison's drafts as well as of his research into Harlem's children and American mythic fantasies.

Likewise, Ann Petry's novel *The Street* (1946) opens with a meticulous inventory of all the different kinds of papers—flyers, ticket stubs, sandwich wrappers, envelopes, newspapers, and so on—that populate, surround, and practically attack the protagonist, Lutie Johnson, as she walks in Harlem. Petry not only emphasizes this kind of materiality on a thematic level but also, like Richard Wright does with *Native Son*, composed her novel out of a careful study of emerging socioeconomic statistical data. Both Petry and Wright bend their naturalist fiction to "explain the statistics that regularly confused people and seemed to support the hoary notions of biological inferiority."[59] Where Wright merges his fiction, memoir, and photojournalistic practice to expose the "reality of the Negro problem" for young African American men at midcentury, Petry allows for the neglected positionality of motherhood, womanhood, and blackness to become the dominant perspective in the defiant figure of Lutie. Despite manifesting a distinct archival sensibility unique to their individuality, each of the midcentury authors in my project displays a personal commitment to combining record building with aesthetic practice as a means to ensure group survival.

Undergirding the formation of black personal archives is the constantly shifting, ever-widening cultural battle over who is valued and what is valuable. The dual tasks of novel writing and archiving converge in the act of transvaluation—and literary papers, a subset of "personal papers," become

a privileged site that maps on a granular level the countercultural hopes of a present to come. It follows that the mutability of what is considered valuable, which the lifecycles concept lays bare, is a governing concern of this book. This contingency of use value is what makes the archival profession so challenging and the work of novelists, artists, literary scholars, and cultural historians so vital. Although scholars have long been able to address and celebrate the ability of African American literature to articulate and embody functions we associate with the archive—recuperation, memory, preservation—the actual access to authors' private collections has been fraught with natural and institutional delays. Even after acquisition, a collection can remain in the backlog for years until the repository's resources allow for processing. Yet for literary collections to exist at all, authors need to have preserved their papers in the first place. By necessity, therefore, this book turns to major midcentury black novelists whose papers are (mostly) now available to researchers. Literary papers offer scholars the opportunity to track the different forking paths of documents or artifacts preserved in these authors' own files, journeys that sometimes span several lifecycles, including ultimately that of posthumous publication. As a result, modern literary archives emerge as new assemblages to be reckoned with as we attempt to rebuild the past. A single author's papers are never singular—they are always polyphonic: at the same time that they complicate and enrich our understanding of a given writer, they offer new perspectives onto countless figures, events, institutions, and relationships that can be read from myriad disciplinary approaches. As Terry Cook says, there are always "*fonds* within *fonds*."[60] If a human being's life can contain Whitmanesque multitudes, then a single literary collection can potentially refashion an entire field's underlying architecture.

This book uses the tools of literary criticism to closely read and unpack the richly suggestive language of archival science, and, in turn, it also applies the governing prisms and paradigms of archival practice to our discussions of the literary. The role of the archive in my work is therefore both methodological and thematic: first, I deploy material-text tools by incorporating these authors' caches of research materials, correspondence, drafts, diaries, and aborted, undisclosed, or unpublished pieces, obtained during my

visits to their various repositories. Second, I extricate how the political and aesthetic stakes of research, documentation, artifacts, ephemera, curation, and classification practices are foregrounded within their novels and other works. Set against the historical background of the rise of modern literary papers, I further explore how black literary archives smuggle radicalism into traditional sites of cultural and national authority—such as the Library of Congress and the Ivy League—and thereby destabilize incumbent identities while opening the door to new systems of value.

I am interested in thinking about the novel's role in what Henry James calls a "perpetually provisional" democratization:[61] how novelists enter democratic discourse by celebrating certain marginal types and institutions, by including neglected artifacts and documents, and thus by dramatizing the struggle for historical legibility not just in their artistic output but also in their private archival practices. In other words, the act of arrangement performed by the living writer—both within novels and through personal archives—carries meaning beyond the item being singled-out for "filing"; arrangement transforms the item's meaning and ascribes it new value. Similarly, so does the scholar's excavating work; as the historian Carolyn Steedman suggests, the object under investigation is "altered by the very search for it."[62] In other words, the nomadic artifact, once caught, takes its place within a system of thought and literary production that allows it to be put into relation to the creator's larger oeuvre. The work of archivists in processing the collection's contents performs analogous functions; in giving further definition and shape to the author's archive, archivists guide—or, perhaps one should say, manipulate—scholarly practice. As a subset of the personal, they reflect the idiosyncrasies of individuality and excesses of circumstance that confound any "critical consensus."

I am thus concerned with analyzing both the *archival function* novels serve—the way they can stand as alternative, expanded, or even counterfactual sites of historical preservation—and the roles that novelists have played as archivists and record creators. I explore these authors' own appraisal strategies and record-creating processes and, at times, their own research practices to uncover how their archival sensibility informs their novelistic practice. The papers that novelists amass and create offer

ways for them to negotiate civic, social, and national estrangement; how and what they choose to document and record in the world reflect the kind of nation they are working to redefine, both in the present moment and for posterity. In this respect, these authors are appropriating for themselves the strategies usually reserved—and originally conceived—for imperial governance.

Although in *Along the Archival Grain* Stoler is speaking exclusively of colonial archives—the Dutch colonial archives to be more specific—she parses how the documents produced by administrators continue to have varied uses even after "the moment of their making has passed." In Stoler's words, these archives represent "an arsenal of sorts" that can be "reactivated" at a moment's notice "to suit new governing strategies." "Documents honed in the pursuit of prior issues could be requisitioned to write new histories," she explains, "could be reclassified for new initiatives, could be renewed to fortify security measures against what were perceived as new assaults on imperial sovereignty and its moralizing claims."[63] Within Stoler's portrait of discourse control, of governance rooted in its materiality, we may also glimpse—in an admittedly radically different context—a description of how novelists make use of the documents they create and gather for subversive political ends. In other words, how a novel chooses to be historical is an argument about history, preservation, and the archive. Yet literature, or the literary, is not just a substitute archive; it is both a symbolic engagement with and a material critique of governmental and organizational record management.

Steedman suggests that "in the Archive, you cannot be shocked at its exclusions, its emptinesses, at what is *not* catalogued, at what was—so the returned call-slip tells you—'destroyed by enemy action during the Second World War.' . . . Its condition of being deflects outrage: in its quiet folders and bundles is the neatest demonstration of how state power has operated, through ledgers and lists and indictments, and what is missing from them."[64] But unlike the acquiescing, presumably white historian, the black novelist must go against the grain of what Steedman describes. Nor can any Jamesonian waning of affect be tolerated for most black historians, as Michel-Rolph Trouillot's seminal recuperative history of the Haitian revolution,

Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History, demonstrates.[65] To regard the archive's "condition of being" as what "deflects outrage" stems from the historical privilege of having successfully silenced the past. In contrast, here is what a twenty-eight-year-old Ralph Ellison wrote to Richard Wright after having consulted the Farm Security Administration photographic record collected in Wright's book *12 Million Black Voices*: "The trauma of passing from the country to the city of destruction brought no anesthesia of unconsciousness, but left our nerves peeled and quivering. We are not the numbed, but the seething. God! It makes you want to write and write and write, or murder."[66] For Ellison, the communal experience of blackness brought a necessary outrage that compelled him toward both violence and repeated acts of writing. Both were means of filling in the emptinesses, and we must be thankful that Ellison channeled most of his energies into literary acts and a lifelong accumulation of personal records.

The filling of "gaps" with "fiction" is precisely what some historians, notably Arlette Farge, find most objectionable in the novelist's use of archival materials—and, by extension, the literary scholar's use of a novel as a historically valid resource. In her sublime little book *Le goût de l'archive*, translated as *The Allure of Archives*, Farge disagrees that "fiction is the ideal way to free oneself from the constraints of the discipline [history] and make the archive live again." "The argument that the novel resurrects the archive and gives it life," Farge declares, is "not a real argument at all," and writing novels "has nothing to do with 'writing history.'" Yet for all of her reticence to accept fiction as an ethically valid filler for history's gaps, even when the work in question is steeped in a "knowledge of the archive," Farge, like all historians, is also in the business of telling stories. Indeed, she intersperses her chapters on eighteenth-century French history with anecdotes from her research visits to various repositories, using her own "gift for writing to captivate readers and take them on a very specific adventure." Did she include these stories to subtly (and paradoxically) keep open the door to narrative as another possible ethical means "to do right by these many forgotten lives"?[67] Or was it simply, and humbly, to further inscribe her own fallible self as a historical subject? Nevertheless, even if we disallow any consideration of the novel as history, we cannot escape the fact that the formation of special

collections can become a means of writing history. Moreover, if, as countless historians such as Steedman have shown, public archives "came into being in order to solidify and memorialize first monarchical and then state power"[68]—in other words, as a prosthetic of state power—then private archives can serve a similar purpose for the private citizen.

THE PARALLAX OF THE REFERENCE DESK

There are two temporalities to keep distinct here: that of novelistic creation—stretched over a varying number of active years and accompanied by idiosyncratic record production and record compiling—and that of the literary collection being acquired, processed, and made available to researchers, its contents released once more upon the world via scholarship, museum exhibitions, posthumous publications, and more. These two overarching lifecycles are interrelated, and they mutually, often retroactively transform each other. The writer's archive is the perpetually unfinished text, spanning decades, amassing successes and failures, speaking back to a multiplicity of fixed temporal moments upon which scholars can alight, sometimes even deceiving themselves into believing that it just might be possible to step into the same river twice.

At the same time, literary scholars need to be more cognizant of the ways in which the history of archival science has come to affect the very artifacts at the center of our profession. To that end, chapter 1 is a concerted look at how archivists have conceived of personal papers over the past century and how such evolving conceptualization necessarily affected both the kinds of materials that were preserved and how they were arranged. Works of literary criticism based on "the archive" too often fail to engage with the labor and scholarship produced by archivists, those who have been acquiring, cataloging, appraising, controlling, and curating the collections that have become essential resources in the revitalization of the discipline. The elasticity of the term *archival* in criticism today represents both a challenge and an opportunity: as an opportunity, it allows us to think about history,

memory, documentary, record keeping, and other related concerns as part of a cross-disciplinary network; as a challenge, it threatens to become so diluted a concept as to be practically devoid of meaning and can, in fact, prevent true interdisciplinary conversation.

A survey of recent archival criticism reveals some distinct and overlapping analytical trends. One branch, spearheaded by Suzanne Keen's book *Romances of the Archive in Contemporary British Fiction*, investigates the surge of narratives that feature archives at the core of their plots, usually by having the protagonists perform archival research in libraries or other repositories. A central example would be A. S. Byatt's novel *Possession* (1990), but Stieg Larsson's Millennium trilogy and even films such as *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (Steven Spielberg, 1989) also fall within that category. For Keen and for the British tradition she examines, romances of the archive are often successful; in these romances, "characters are transformed, wrongs righted, disasters averted, villains exposed, crimes solved."[69] On the American side, however, success or closure remains persistently elusive—artifacts are rarely found, answers are withheld, evidence is destroyed—and this is doubly true for the African American tradition.

Perhaps the quintessential African American postwar "archive" novel is David Bradley's *The Chaneysville Incident* (1981), whose protagonist, John Washington, is a historian by trade who spends most of the novel doing extensive research, scouring an imposing array of artifacts, and creating piles of notes on index cards, desperate for clues to both his father's demise and the "incident": the apparent ritual suicide of thirteen fugitive slaves. Early on, the novel revels in the historian's forensic excitement in the face of mystery. Entering his father's office in the attic, the hidden site of his family archive, Washington recounts: "It was almost as if the chair, the table, the book, the lamp, the empty fireplace, were items under glass; they were the keys to a man's mind, laid bare to me, clues to a mystery, the answer to every question there. All I had to do was interpret them. It was the greatest thrill I had ever known."[70] In the end, however, he must confront the fact that he will always be left with speculation, uncertainty, and absence—the polar opposite of the positivist fantasy Keen ascribes to the British tradition. Washington has to learn "to accept the idea that we will never

know everything," that there is no such thing as a "Historians' Heaven: a firmly fixed chamber far removed from the subjective uncertainties of this mortal coil, where there is a gallery of pictures of the dinosaur taken constantly from every angle, and motion pictures, and cross sections." What frustrates Washington, as it frustrates novelists and literary scholars, is the fact that despite having gathered an impressive array of facts and despite having taken careful chronological notes on index cards, he has ultimately just "help[ed] order events." The notes and cards provide "no suppositions or connections. No cause and effect." As a historian, Washington refuses to allow "imagination" to fill in the gaps—there can be "no imagination in it," he says, adding, "You can't create facts. But you can discover the connections . . . there's a point where all the facts just come together and the ideas come out. It's like a fire, smoldering, and then it catches, and the flame catches other things, and then it's like a forest fire."[71] Alas, this fire both purifies and destroys the very edifice of evidence that was erected through the archive. Fittingly, the novel ends not on a note of triumph but rather of equanimity as the historian literally sets fire to his own research, precisely on the original site where the slaves chose death rather than recapture. However, he does, I would like to underscore, restore his family's attic archive and leaves it open for the next (re)searcher.

The Chaneysville Incident is a prototype of Saidiya Hartman's "critical fabulation": the novel intends "both to tell an impossible story and to amplify the impossibility of its telling."[72] Formally structured around zigzagging dates, the novel presents an encyclopedic hodgepodge of generic styles in the tradition of *Moby-Dick* (1851), grafting academic prose to imaginative fiction, shifting between thrilling adventure sections and abstruse jargon that drastically slows down the pace. Epistemic disappointment repeatedly befalls the historian who can never gather enough "facts" to solve the mystery of his family, of the "incident," and, ultimately, of slavery. The novel's material ties to slavery come via the artifacts preserved by the family, notably the unfinished journal of John's great-grandfather, C. K., an escaped slave. Through nonlinear intergenerational time hopping, the novel enacts the collapsing temporalities of the archive that define so much of postwar African American literature. Washington uncovers "horror stories"

populated by "ghosts" yet retains a scholarly distance that appalls his girlfriend, who sees such professionalism as a lack of empathy. She shouts, "You just sit there on top of all this . . . I don't even know what to call it. Death. Horrible things. And you make notes on little cards and then you ask for another cup of coffee." But Washington's veneer eventually breaks under the weight of his archival excavation: "I fell prey to one of the greatest fallacies that surrounds the study of the past: the notion that there is such a thing as a detached researcher, that it is possible to discover and analyze and interpret without getting caught up and swept away."[73] As in the case of McKay's final novel, the consultation of notes and newspapers—archival research—both politicizes the tale and irrevocably affects the human being doing the excavation.

As "critical fabulation," Bradley's novel is thus an example of what Linda Hutcheon calls "historiographic metafiction," a mode whose popularity arose precisely alongside the increased proliferation of literary papers in the university. African American masters of the genre such as Ishmael Reed weaved modernist and postmodernist elements with folk tales, creating dialogic polyphonies that usually involved collapsed temporalities, and often represented the living communing with dead ancestors, finding their spirit embodied in material objects or sites. Perhaps the nearest white counterpart to *The Chaneysville Incident*—aside from Stephen King's *The Shining* (1977)—may be Don DeLillo's novel *Libra* (1988). Released seven years after Bradley's novel, *Libra* exemplifies the archive's failure to provide any kind of closure, producing instead an elaborate paranoid conspiracy. Even Nicholas Branch, the CIA's own archivist, who collects, processes, and analyzes all documents and records related to the Kennedy assassination, never "solves" the case, never knows the truth. "Some stories never end," DeLillo states in the opening sentence of his introduction to the reissue of *Libra* in 2006, and he goes on to speak of Branch—a name that implies being simply a part, a limb of the whole—as the voice that "maintains that facts are brittle things. He maintains that the past is changing even as he sits and thinks about it."[74] Branch's relation to the past, here expressed by DeLillo years after completing *Libra* (Libra[ry]), is a compelling articulation of

the archive's ideological underpinning—it is the site where the past changes at every sitting. As in *The Chaneysville Incident*, in *Libra* we have accumulation without grand narrative, correspondences without clear connections, excess defined by gaps.

An approach related to Keen's considers what Marco Codebò calls "narrating from the archive," a practice "where the narrative stores records, bureaucratic writing informs language, and the archive functions as a semiotic frame that structures the text's context and meaning." These "archive novels" usually contain an archival theme woven within their plots and produce "the same kind of meaning-making operations executed by the records, files, and inventories that characterize bureaucratic archives' practices."[75] Whereas Keen restricts her analysis to postwar Britain, Codebò discusses examples from both nineteenth- and twentieth-century European and American fiction (Manzoni, Balzac, Flaubert, Perec, DeLillo). The authors of these archival romances, in a reflection of the authors studied here, often performed their own behind-the-scenes archival quests in order to craft their narratives, thereby creating layers of archival *mise-en-abîme*.

Another prominent trend in current criticism is simply to consider literature—usually the novel but poetry as well—as an alternative site of historical preservation, a counterpoint to official or "major" history. Fiction thus becomes a historical corrective or supplement, a trove of otherwise unobtainable sets of historical data that were considered "too obscure for learned classification," to use Ellison's phrase,[76] yet nevertheless contain objectivity gaps resulting from levels of fictionalization. When applied to twentieth-century—especially postwar—texts, this branch of criticism usually demonstrates in often illuminating ways how such historical fiction, in flaunting its status as speculative, can thus act as a "statement" on historiography and the meaning-making processes we impose on the past. As Linda Hutcheon observes, such "postmodern novels scrutinize the process of 'event becoming fact,'"[77] a statement that also aptly describes what McKay is doing in *Amiable with Big Teeth*. A related aspect of this kind of criticism tackles those kinds of experiences that never or rarely leave a "record" behind. The body of African American literature, perhaps more than any

other in the American tradition, imposes itself as a counterarchival imaginative documentation that allows such "nonevents" to become history, reflecting the "historical pluralism" Hayden White describes.[78]

A fourth trend in archival literary criticism emerges out of the nineteenth-century epistolary novel: the *Archivroman*. The term was first applied to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years* (1821), a "novel" composed of a mishmash of shorter narrative pieces, letters, poetry, aphorisms, and so on, creating generic chaos. In other words, this novel form seems to be a raw archive in disarray, a "special collection" of disparate genres not yet arranged but bound together between two covers as a means of stretching novelistic boundaries—in short, novels of this type, such as Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee* (1982), Jack Kerouac's *Visions of Cody* (1972), Max Frisch's *Man in the Holocene* (1979), and John Keene's *Counternarratives* (2015), to name a few, have an undeniable "archival poetics."[79] A subset of this approach doubles down on the novel form in its materiality to consider bibliographic aspects of the book and its production process—from dust jackets to changing covers for various or foreign editions to matters of typesetting and the typography of the page.

The four types just described, in addition to more purely theoretical engagements inspired by Derrida and Foucault, are common rubrics under which literary scholars are choosing to think of the archive and literature together. Although by no means exhaustive and certainly overlapping, they represent the chief taxonomic prisms through which archival criticism operates. Taken together, concerned with both form and content, they demonstrate how novels, as Aarthi Vadde elegantly puts it, "reflect upon history as a mode of writing and a pattern of assembly."[80] One of the most interesting features of this contemporary criticism is that literary scholars, historians, and archivists are producing it. Although they are rarely working collaboratively—and are, in fact, often working in isolation for separate audiences—a nascent interdisciplinary network is emerging. This book navigates all these critical approaches, guided by the needs and the natures of the lifecycles under investigation.

Much of my own thinking about literary papers has come from two distinct yet mutually informative experiences: first, the time I spent as an

intern processing publisher and literary archives in Columbia University's Rare Book and Manuscript Library and, second, my trips from one repository to another for research. This book is thus a product of the parallax of the reference desk: shuttling between the scholar's usual position in front and the hidden world in back. Although literary archives are often jarringly distinct from administrative records in both form and formation, they have nevertheless often been processed by individuals trained in record management. Though processing archivists assigned to personal collections today may be more cognizant than archivists of yesteryear when it comes to the unique features of literary papers, the fact remains that the majority of extant literary collections were handled by professionals without specialized knowledge of literary history, just as many literary scholars are untrained in the ways of the archivist.

Indeed, as the work of Senior Archivist Catherine Hobbs has made clear, the area of personal archives—of which literary archives are a subset—was utterly undertheorized until the turn of the twenty-first century.[81] Not only has archival theory "done a terrible job of accommodating the particular needs of individual people's archives," argues Hobbs, but it has "also made little effort to accommodate adequately the particular exigencies of literary archives."[82] Literary papers are a special breed; the archivist David Sutton describes them as "the most volatile and unpredictable type" of personal papers.[83] Like Hobbs, Sutton calls for a better understanding of how most already-accessible literary collections have been handled. Such insider knowledge of the archivist's oft-misunderstood profession can clarify why the archivist imposed intellectual control on personal and literary materials, a clarification that in turn can be of both practical and theoretical use in helping scholars reckon with the changing values assigned to the literary.

In recent years, perhaps without realizing, literary scholars and archivists have been moving in similar directions through their mutual shift away from an understanding of archival records as *product* toward a sense of them as *process*. For archivists, this invisible resonance has taken place as part of a larger effort to grasp the nature and role of archival *fonds*.[84] Much like some of the latest trends in literary criticism, recent archival

"macroappraisal" theory has called for "a shift away from the records themselves to the social context in which the records are created."[85] For archivists, this shift is yet another, more refined means of following *respect des fonds*, the single most important guiding principle of the archival profession. In general terms, emerging out of the European tradition and the "Dutch Manual"—the colloquial name given to the book *Arrangement and Description of Archives* (1898) composed by the Dutch trio Samuel Muller, Johan Adriaan Feith, and Robert Fruin—to respect the *fonds* is to uphold the twofold dictums of provenance and the "sanctity of original order"—namely, "the maintenance of which focused on preserving the logical structure and internal arrangement of the records of each creator," as Terry Cook puts it. To be more precise, Cook explains, the *fonds* is the "theoretical product of both creation (provenance) and arrangement (original order)" and is thus a manifestation of "both a logical and a physical reality." The battles and difficulties over how *fonds* is ultimately conceptualized, let alone practically applied "to descriptive or appraisal practice," thus rest on "a central contradiction in archival theory": documents are inevitably both product and process.[86]

Put another way, the *fonds* is the Schrödinger's cat paradox of archival physics. Like the cat in the famous thought experiment, records are in a kind of stasis—akin to what Jacques Derrida calls *survivance*, perpetually suspended between life and death, partaking of both.[87] In archival quantum mechanics, explains Cook, "the essential describable unit of archives" acts both as a wave and as a particle; it is simultaneously "a function, a process, a dynamic activity on the one hand, and a concrete product, an artifact, a record on the other."[88] Such definitions of archival *fonds* in many ways uncannily reflect how literary studies has come to understand novelistic and bibliographic practices. As Catherine Hobbs puts it, "Literary archives have a particular resonance for archivists" because "acts of documentation blend very closely (in space and time) with acts of literary creation."[89] The literary artifact encountered in the reading room becomes, according to Tyler Walters, the "physical expression of personal interactions and organizational processes"; this artifact reflects the tidalectical ebb and flow of the discipline's evolution, its alternating desire for hermeneutical interpretation and

textual forensics.[90] In short, literary scholarship and the archival profession have a singular affinity.

As Cook makes clear, it is incumbent upon the modern archivist to have "a clear understanding of the nature, scope and authority of the creator of the records involved and of the records-creating process."[91] The evidential power—the traditional raison d'être of archives—to be gleaned from the papers of creators involved in the business of literature and art (from authors to publishers to booksellers) can thus be increased only by the close involvement of related professionals at the archival-processing level. Put another way, training literary scholars in archival and library science or, alternatively, training archivists in literary criticism and methods would mutually benefit each profession in ways that are congruent with the changes each group is facing and will continue to face. Most curators in charge of repositories were traditionally trained as historians.[92] Although this is a logical background for an archivist to have, the kinds of preparation and intellectual formation given to historians are distinct from the sensibilities honed through the study of literature. As I address in chapter 1, these differences inevitably affected the ways in which collections were appraised—both in terms of which collections were selected as worthy of preservation and in terms of how they were internally policed—over the course of the twentieth century. Interestingly, recent scholarship by archivists on literary archives has indicated the need to diversify the disciplinary background, not to mention the biopolitical diversity, of incoming librarians. Only those archivists trained in the latest literary methods, familiar with book history and, for example, the unreliability of the best-seller list as indicator of posterity, will be in a position to address the complexity of determining "the importance of the writer" being appraised for possible archivization.[93]

This is especially important for minority authors whose works struggle to have visibility both to the public and in the academy. Hiring literary scholars trained in minority literature as acquisition directors or at least as consultants can go a long way toward redressing the diversity pool of available data for posterity. Scholars trained in African American studies and in the studies of other minority cultures (Latinx, LGBTQ, Indigenous) bring a salutary alternative perspective to potential targets of acquisition

through their expertise in the new emerging vessels of value of the past century. Take, for instance, the establishment of the Hip Hop Archive and Research Institute at Harvard University in 2002 under the pioneering direction of Marcyliena Morgan or the Hip Hop History Archive founded by Johan Kugelberg at Cornell in 2008. Since the late 1990s, through his company Boo-Hooray, Kugelberg has helped organize, consolidate, and place close to one hundred unique collections of postwar radicalism in the United States. From Afrika Bambaataa to Ed Sanders, punk rock to the Amsterdam News Photography Archive, Ed Wood's pornographic pulp fiction to the Living Theatre, Kugelberg has been an architect of salvation for many unique, endangered, marginal postwar collections.

As a corollary, an increase in archivist and librarian positions, or post-custodial roles, for persons of color and members of the communities whose materials are being preserved would be ideal to aid the continued transformation and reclamation efforts of literary history. Even when the creation of new staff positions remains prohibitive, a potential immediate measure would be to establish collaborations between those responsible for new acquisitions and the literary scholars already present at a given institution. Just as an acquisition director can consult with faculty about future accessions, a processing archivist could invite a leading scholar in a given field to be present during the initial survey phase of a collection or to peruse the extent of relevant materials at some preappraisal point. Ideally, the scholar could be accompanied by students during this survey visit, thereby demystifying much of the process and allowing further collaboration. Though the logistics of this process may not always be feasible, its implementation may prove uniquely valuable.

The tenets of "minimal processing" that have taken hold since the popularity of Mark A. Greene and Dennis Meissner's essay "More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing" inadvertently invite this kind of involvement on the part of researchers because less material, generally speaking, is thrown out.[94] Thus, in the new economy of "more product, less process," the onus of time is now on the researcher: there is just more paper to look through to find the few golden nuggets. In turn, when something "new" or noteworthy is found nestled within a given folder

or notebook, researchers can in turn inform the archivists about the find—through such microcollaborations, the collection's finding aid may be amended to alert future researchers (essentially enlisting scholars as fellow processors).

Such collaborations between researcher and archivist mirror those that take place in the reading room during the communion between record creator and scholar. Within that quantum space materialized by the encounter, that place where future hands brush the pages of the past, we receive the transformative transmission. In preserving their records, authors allow for that materiality to be welcomed as an integral part of their oeuvre. This is the pledge and promise of shadow archivism, where the preservation of records anticipates a future when the dream may once again grow young, where the vicissitudes of blackness, the split and fragmented, the delayed and deferred, the incomplete and undecipherable nature of these archives become the message. Product and process, these archives are portraits of unwritten, removed, lost lives that the conditions of white supremacy have sundered. Hurled into darkness, these hibernating boomerangs are about to come up for breath. Keep a steel helmet handy.