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“what IS Art?”:  
LEO TOLSTOY in  
The writings of  
CLAUDE MCKAY  
tatiana tagirova

## RESUMEN

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EL EJEMPLO DE LA LITERATURA RUSA DEL SIGLO DIECINUEVE y especialmente la de Leo Tolstoy son importantes en el análisis de Claude McKay y sus logros artísticos. En *Home to Harlem* (1928) y *Banjo* (1929), Ray entabla un diálogo sustituto con los escritores rusos del siglo diecinueve que lo lleva a una profunda apreciación del legado africano dentro de la identidad caribeña y juega un papel importante en su propuesta de una solución al dilema de la identidad bicultural. En su última novela, *Banana Bottom* (1933), McKay finalmente resuelve el conflicto principal de las primeras dos novelas y crea un protagonista integrado, anclado en la cultura y las tradiciones Jamaicanas.

Palabras claves: Leo Tolstoy, identidad bicultural, doble consciencia, cultura afro-caribeña, protagonista dividido, protagonista integrado, literatura caribeña

## ABSTRACT

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RUSSIAN LITERATURE OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY PLAYS an important role in Claude McKay's artistic development and formulation of a solution to his dilemma of a dual cultural identity. While in his first two novels Ray's engagement in a surrogate dialogue with Tolstoy leads simply to a discussion of the importance of the African heritage within a Caribbean identity, in *Banana Bottom* there is an action, an actual integration of an educated colonial with the common Jamaican people and the Afro-Jamaican culture that they represent. In his last novel McKay's search for a particular Afro-Caribbean identity started by Ray within North American and French settings comes to a completion in an authentic Jamaican environment.

Keywords: Dual Cultural Identity, Afro-Caribbean culture, Double consciousness, Leo Tolstoy, split protagonist, integrated protagonist, Caribbean literature

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RUSSIAN LITERATURE OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY PLAYS an important role in Claude McKay's formulation of a solution to his dilemma of a dual cultural identity and his literary development. The alienation of the educated from the uneducated, the connection of art with contemporary re-

ality and the seminal role of the writer in the development of the nation are some of the Russian themes that influenced McKay's formation as a writer. Instead of imitating Western standards of his time and producing the inauthentic works to which Leo Tolstoy refers in his essay "What is Art?" (1898), he turns to the indigenous Caribbean and African American culture and its people as the main source of his inspiration. Parallel to Feodor Dostoyevsky and Leo Tolstoy, the Russian writers who contest the positive effects of Western rationalism and individualism and affirm their national culture, McKay is an example of an effort to create a distinct difference between Caribbean and Western modes of thinking.

It is not a coincidence that Ray, the Haitian narrator of *Home to Harlem* (1928), reads Feodor Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and considers Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov and Turgenev to be creators of genuine art. His engagement with these Russian writers in *Home to Harlem* and his subsequent internal dialogue with Tolstoy in *Banjo* (1929) reveal the influence of Russian literature on his intellectual and artistic development. In *Home to Harlem*, Ray borrows the question from Tolstoy's famous essay "What is Art?" while pondering about a type of art he would like to create. However, unlike the Tolstoy he admires, who comes closer to the Russian peasants in whom he finds the intelligence, vitality, and true expression of the Russian culture, Ray merely looks nostalgically at the Africans. No matter how hard he tries, he cannot reconcile his Western education and Afro-Caribbean heritage within himself on the pages of McKay's first two novels. Ray is an alienated West Indian intellectual who desires to come closer to the masses, but though fascinated with the Russian "native soil" thinkers, he is not able to fully assimilate their example. He understands the contradictions between intellect and instinct, but doesn't want to forsake either one of them. While his contact with the black community of *Banjo* brings him closer to his African-based roots, he is unable to undergo a complete change. Only in his last novel *Banana Bottom* (1933) the writer's search for a particular Afro-Caribbean identity started by Ray within North American and French settings comes to a completion in his native Jamaican environment. If in the first two novels, Ray's engagement in a surrogate dialogue with Tolstoy leads to a discussion of the importance of the African heritage within a Caribbean identity, in *Banana Bottom* there is an action, an integration of an educated colonial with Jamaican people and the Afro-Jamaican culture that they represent. In his last novel, then, McKay actually applies the example of the Russian master to an Anglophone Caribbean context and resolves the psychological dilemma of his previous novels.

The search for black identity and the influence of the dominant European ethnocentrism comprise some of McKay's most characteristic tensions. Even though he was born in a country with an educational system directed in

such a way that native Jamaicans were encouraged to accept the superiority of British cultural and literary forms and standards, from his early childhood he refused to become completely submerged in the foreign culture.<sup>1</sup> As a poet and an individual who had the previous experience of living between two worlds, the world of the Jamaican black peasants and the world of the British literary and cultural traditions, he related to the nineteenth century Russian “native soil” thinkers who questioned the imposition of a centuries-long foreign culture on their national identity. Parallel to Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy who contributed to the development of their national personality through their writings, McKay contested previous Western imitations, generated a type of art embedded in indigenous Caribbean culture and its people and became one of the pioneering creators of Anglophone Caribbean literature.

Despite McKay’s importance in the creation of West Indian Literature, however, his development of an original form of expression was not an easy task for the writer influenced by the British literary forms and standards. As he states in “A Moscow Lady,” the article published in *Crisis* in September 1924, his subjection to Anglo-Saxon world monopolists was his “only inheritance” (227). The Russian proletariat’s task of creating a culture different from the bourgeois one that had for centuries existed in pre-revolutionary Russia was not “as simple as it seems at first glance” (Trotsky, 184). It was also not easy for McKay and other twentieth century Caribbean-born intellectuals to escape from white European dominance within the Caribbean colonial context in which all efforts had been made to enforce foreign culture on the natives.

In *Home to Harlem*, his best-selling novel celebrating Harlem’s black masses, he gives importance to the notion of double consciousness and applies it to his West Indian background. The absence of the monologic consciousness is characteristic of McKay’s Ray, a character who searches for his own voice among many other voices presented in *Home to Harlem* and struggles to reconcile his African identity with Western influence. Commenting on his belonging to a black race, he states,

These men claimed kinship with him. They were black like him. Man and nature had put them in the same race. He ought to love them and feel them (if they felt anything). He ought to if he had a shred of social morality in him. They were all chain-ganged together and he was counted as one link. Yet he loathed every soul in that great barrack room, except Jake. Race. Why should he have and love a race? (106)

Even though Ray understands that white civilization and Western education have negative effects on black people, he cannot fully reject them.

Despite his intellectual knowledge of African history and culture, he demonstrates an ambivalent attitude toward blackness by his desire to belong to a white nation:

Great races and big nations! There must be something mighty inspiring in being the citizen of a great strong nation. To be the white citizen of a nation that can say bold, challenging things like a strong man. Something very different from the keen ecstatic joy the man feels in the romance of being black. Something the black man could never feel nor quite understand. (106)

He is alienated from the black masses of Harlem due to the cultural and intellectual background that makes him feel superior. Ray demonstrates his allegiance to the Western culture and influences and understands the difference between himself and the uneducated masses of Harlem.

The European voice is one of the prominent ones among which he has to discover his own. In *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*, Russian writers of the nineteenth century are central influences in his inner drama. They exemplify a type of art that Ray would like to create in *Home to Harlem*. As he thinks of achieving an original form in his writings, he engages in an internal dialogue with them:

Dreams of making something with words. What could he make... and fashion? Could he ever create Art? Art, around which vague, incomprehensible words and phrases stormed? What was art, anyway? Was it more than a clear-cut presentation of a vivid impression of life? Only the Russians of the later era seemed to stand up like giants in the new. Gogol, Dostoevski, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Turgeniev. When he read them now he thought: Here were elements that the grand carnage swept over and touched not. The soil of life saved their roots from the fire. They were so saturated, so deep-down rooted in it. (158-159)

The nineteenth-century Russian writers offer him a counterpart to the European influences. They are the voices that play an important role in Ray's formation. Like the influence of new points of view in the writings of Dostoyevsky that present a resolution to the questions of "Who am I?" and "With whom am I?" (Bakhtin, 238), they help Ray to find answers to some of his questions. Parallel to Dostoyevsky's characters, whose main task in the novels is to "find one's own voice and to orient it to others, to separate one's voice from another voice with which it has inseparably merged (Bakhtin, 239), Ray searches for his own identity among both European and African influences.

As a writer, he desires to find an original form of literary expression.

In *Banjo*, Ray continues his search for an authentic artistic expression and conducts a more complex, longer-lasting dialogue with Tolstoy. This “great Russian” and “fanatic moralist” is his ideal of the artist (66). In fact, he is “the most wonderful example of one who balanced his creative work by a life lived out to its illogical end (65). Ray understands that his nature, his outlook, and his attitude towards life are significantly different from those of Tolstoy, yet he is very appreciative of the Russian master:

What lifted him up and carried him away, after Tolstoy’s mighty art was his equally mighty life of restless searching within and without, and energetic living to find himself until the very end. Rimbaud moved him with the same sympathy, but Tolstoy’s appeal was stronger, because he lived longer and was the greater creator. (66)

Even though at the end of the novel Ray is still favoring his intellect, Tolstoy’s writings bring him closer to the black men of Marseilles who possess more potential for racial salvation than the Negro intelligentsia. As Ray notes, the black international masses he meets in Marseilles teach him how to exist as a black man in a white world. In them, he finds sincerity, warmth and a sense of community that he thinks are not characteristic of the “civilized” upper or middle classes.

Again McKay’s voice is heard through his main character, Ray. In response to another character, Goosey, and his advice to write about “race men and women” who make a good living in Paris, he states that he is not a reporter for the Negro press and cannot keep up with black “society folk” of Paris who might prefer to have Monsieur Paul Morand, “a society writer,” describe them (116). He does not think that upper- or middle-class black folks are good examples of his race:

I can’t see that. They say you find the best Negro society in Washington. When I was there the government clerks and school- teachers and the wives of the few professional men formed a group and called themselves the “upper classes.” They were nearly all between your complexion and near-white. The women wore rich clothes and I don’t know whether it was that or their complexions or their teaching or clerking ability that put them in the “upper class.” In my home we had an upper class of Negroes, but it had big money and property and power. It wasn’t just a moving-picture imitation. School-teachers and clerks didn’t make any ridiculous pretenses of belonging to it... I could write about the society of Negroes you mean if I wrote a farce. (116)

Ray finds the imitation of the upper class by the middle-class North American Negroes amusing. He attacks their hypocrisy and snobbery:

Gee! I remember when I was in college in America how those Negroes getting an education could make me tired talking class and class all the time. It was funny and it was sad. There was hardly one of them with the upper-class bug on the brain who didn't have a near relative—a brother or sister who was an ignorant chauffeur, butler, or maid, or a mother paying their way through college with her washtub. If you think it's fine for the society Negroes to fool themselves on the cheapest of imitations, I don't. I am fed up with class. (116-117)

Through Ray, McKay presents his criticism of the black leaders and their strong middle-class orientation that contributes to the neglect of the richness of their African heritage. Ray believes that until black intellectuals acknowledge their racial heritage, they will never produce a real renaissance:

And I wonder how we're going to get it. On one side we're up against the world's arrogance—a mighty cold hard white stone thing. On the other the great sweating army—our race. It's the common people, you know, who furnish the bone and sinew and salt of any race or nation. In the modern race of life we're merely beginners. If this renaissance we're talking about is going to be more than a sporadic and scabby thing, we'll have to get down to our racial roots to create it. (200)

Ray suggests turning for example to “whites of a different type” and recommends to turn backs on “all these tiresome clever European novels” and study the Irish cultural and social movement, the struggle of the Russian peasants, the great Russian novelists up to the time of the Russian Revolution, the story of Gandhi and his contribution to the masses of India and “the simple beauty” of the African dialects (201).

His challenge to take pride in Negro roots also extends to the West Indian elite. In chapter XVI of *Banjo*, “The ‘Blue Cinema,’” McKay shows that colonizers have achieved success in dividing West Indians from Africans. At the beginning of the chapter, Ray meets a student from Martinique who is proud of the fact that Empress Josephine was born in his island. He thinks that most people from there are Creole rather than Negro, and “the best people” of Martinique speak “pure French” (199). When Ray asks the Martinican to meet an African from the Ivory Coast, he refuses to go with him to the African bar, saying that the white French changed their attitude toward black people because of the Senegalese who came to France (200). Ray challenges his superior attitude:

You must judge civilization by its general attitude toward primitive peoples, and not by the exceptional cases. You can't get away from the Senegalese and other black Africans any more than you can from the fact that our forefathers were slaves. (200)

He goes on to tell the Martinican student that his white education is the source of his blindness:

You are like many Negro intellectuals who are belly-aching about race,” said Ray. “What is wrong with you-all is your education. You get a white man's education and learn to despise your own people. You read biased history of the whites conquering the colored and primitive peoples, and it thrills you just as it does a white boy belonging to a great white nation. (200-201)

Ray of *Banjo* experiences freedom and relief away from Western civilization that diminishes humanity and feels safe and protected among the masses of the African diaspora. In them he admires the roots saturated in African culture:

They inspired him with confidence in them. Short of extermination by the Europeans, they were a safe people, protected by their own indigenous culture. Even though they stood bewildered before the imposing bigness of white things, apparently unaware of the invaluable worth of their own, they were naturally defended by the richness of their own fundamental racial values. (320)

His close association with the Africans makes him feel that he is not merely “an unfortunate accident of birth,” but that he belongs to a race “weighed, tested, and poised in the universal scheme” (320). They encourage him to take pride in his African heritage and to be confident in his own race and culture. He acknowledges that the black men of Marseilles possess more potential for racial salvation than the Negro intelligentsia:

Ray had felt buttressed by the boys with a rough strength and sureness that gave him spiritual passion and pride to be his human self in an inhumanly alienated world. They lived healthily far beyond the influence of the colored press whose racial dope was characterized by pungent “bleach-out,” “kink-no-more,” skin-whitening, hair-straightening, and innumerable processes for Negro culture, most of them manufactured by white men's firms in the cracker states. (322)



As Ray notes, the black international masses he meets in Marseilles teach him how to exist as a black man in a white world and how to rid his consciousness of “the used-up hussy white morality.” (322)

Tolstoy’s criticism of any type of art that is separate from the real life of every day people and imitative of upper-calls culture and its notion of artistic expression is evident in his famous essay “What is Art?” In his defense of an original form of literary expression, he criticizes those writers who feel that it is important to compare one’s work to that of the already established models:

Dante was considered a great poet, Raphael a great painter, Bach a great musician, and the critics, having no standard by which to distinguish good art from bad, not only consider these artists still great, but also consider all the works of these artists great and worthy of imitation. Nothing has contributed and still contributes so much to the perversion of art as these authorities set up by criticism. (95)

He believes that an author produces an original type of art if it is based on his or her personal feelings and concerns. However, if an artist listens to the critics who say that his work makes him no Dante or Shakespeare, he will start to imitate those who are set up as an example for him and will produce weak, counterfeit works (96).

Ray of *Banjo* has a similar approach to art. While in *Home to Harlem* he ponders what art is, in *Banjo* he seems to be able to formulate his own answer to this question. In his conversation with Goosey, he states that there is no need to emulate somebody else’s culture, for there is always something special and unique about black culture:

If I am a real story-teller, I won’t worry about the differences in complexion of those who listen and those who don’t, I will just identify myself with those who are really listening and tell my story. You see, Goosey, a good story, in spite of those who tell it and those who hear it, is like good ore that you might find in any soil—Europe, Asia, Africa, America. The world wants the ore and gets it by a thousand men scrambling and fighting, digging and dying for it. The world gets its story the same way. (115)

Ray says that he wants to make a practical application of the white proverb “Let down your bucket where you are” for he desires to present a realistic portrayal of life (115). When Goosey says that he might bring up a lot of dirt by describing the everyday reality of the Ditch, he states that steel, gold,

pearls and other rare stones come out of dirt (115). Both Tolstoy and Dostoevsky help Ray to critically analyze the effects of foreign imposition on his national identity and to finally realize the importance of creating art rooted in his own culture and its people.

McKay's search for a particular Caribbean identity that started on the pages of *Home to Harlem* and continued in *Banjo* can be perceived as his coherent attempt to articulate the personal problems of the Caribbean black intellectual at the beginning of the twentieth century and to create a type of writing rooted in African culture and traditions. The collective entity of the folk rather than the individual was of major significance to the Slavophiles, the Russian writers who believed in “values of the simple Russian people, in the ideal of communality, Russian religion, the irrational and the peasant commune with its communal ownership of property” (Chances, 30). A character's integration with his or her culture and its values is also important to McKay. Similar to Tolstoy, who strove to portray the Russian people of the nineteenth century truthfully, he worked towards a unique and distinctive depiction of the Caribbean and African American masses of the twentieth century. A return to the “native soil” and respect for his own people and culture are some of the tendencies that he shares with him.

It is relevant that the first two novels present a split protagonist unable to clearly articulate and formulate his cultural preferences. However, in his third novel McKay transcends the divided rational/emotional impasse and creates a character who is finally able to demonstrate her preference for her native Jamaican culture. If in *Banjo* there is simply discussion about the importance of the African heritage within a Caribbean identity, in *Banana Bottom* there is a practical application of *Banjo*'s version of Tolstoy as a great master who “had turned his back on the intellect as guide to find himself in Ivan Durak” (B 322).<sup>2</sup> The heroine's uprooting from the nurturing Afro-Jamaican soil leads to her more fervent attachment to its cultural and spiritual values. In his last novel, then, McKay actually applies the example of the Russian authors to an Anglophone Caribbean context and resolves the psychological dilemma of his previous novels.

Bitá refuses to be alienated from her past and culture and finds a way to be reintegrated into her home society through an affirmation of her Afro-Jamaican community and traditions. The “proper” British education that she receives in England does not change her love for the peasant ways of life. Upon her return home, her memories of childhood experiences create a sense of belonging to her native community:

Many young natives had gone to the city or abroad for higher culture and had returned aloof from, if not actually despising, the tribal life in which they were nurtured. But the pure joy that Bitá felt in the simple life of her girlhood was

childlike and almost unconscious. She could not reason and theorize why she felt that way. It was just a surging free big feeling. (41)

The heroine enjoys participating in cultural events that demonstrate the rich, flamboyant and vibrant way of life to which she is emotionally attached. One example is her visit to the market:

Bitá mingled in the crowd, responsive to the feeling, the colour, the smell, the swell and press of it. It gave her the sensation of reservoir of familiar kindred spirit into which she had descended for baptism....

The noises of the market were sweeter in her ears than a symphony. Accents and rhythms, movements and colours, nuances that might have passed unnoticed if she had never gone away, were now revealed to her in all their striking detail. And of the foodstuff on view she felt an impulse to touch and fondle a thousand times more than she wanted to buy. (40-41)

The narrator describes Bitá's visit to the market as an experience she can appreciate even more because she has been separated from her homeland:

She had never had that big moving feeling as a girl when she visited the native market. And she thought that if she had never gone abroad for a period so long, from which she had become accustomed to viewing her native life in perspective, she might never had had that experience. (40)

A local dance at Kojo's tea-party is another example of her engagement with the life of Jamaican people:

Bitá danced freely released, danced as she had never danced since she was a girl at a picnic at Tabletop, wiggling and swaying and sliding along, the memories of her tomboyish girlhood rushing sparkling over her like water cascading over one bathing upon a hot summer's day.

The crowd rejoiced to see her dance and some girls stood clapping and stamping to her measure and crying: "Dance, Miss Bitá, dance you' step! Dance, Miss Bitá, dance away!"

And she danced forgetting herself, forgetting even Jubilee, dancing down the barrier between high breeding and common pleasures under her light stamping feet until she was one with the crowd. (84)

While both Squire Gensir and Bita value the folk culture of Jamaican peasants, they have a different reaction to it. At the tea meeting Bita actively participates, but Squire Gensir remains just a spectator. At the end, when Bita glances at him, she notices that he is enjoying the evening. Yet she perceives this enjoyment as “merely cerebral” (85). He can appreciate the culture of the Jamaican peasants only intellectually, whereas she is emotionally attached to the life that touches her inner being.

While Ray in *Home to Harlem* cannot act upon his admiration for Jake’s thoughtless elegance” (Campbell 26) and Ray in *Banjo* wants “to hold on to his intellectual acquisitions” (322-323), Bita chooses to come closer to the Jamaican people and the culture that they represent. Despite the Craigs’ efforts to separate her from the rest of the Jamaican people, she does not feel alienated from them. The more time she spends with the villagers of *Banana Bottom*, the less she desires to go back to Jubilee. She feels “so much pleasanter and freer at *Banana Bottom*” and she is thankful that Anty Nommy’s illness provides an excuse for her to “stay away from Jubilee as long as she could” (161).

Her sense of individuality in spite of foreign influences is remarkable. When Herald Newton, a black theological student who is expected to take over the mission when the Craigs retire, tells her that he would like to marry her because she has been trained like “a pure-minded white lady,” Bita replies, “I don’t know about that. But whatever I was trained like or to be, I know one thing. And that is that I am myself” (100). She understands that her marriage with Newton would advance her socially, for “marrying a good parson was a step higher than marrying a schoolmaster” (101). Yet, the idea of social advancement does not appeal to her. Her confidence in herself helps her to find a solution to “the dilemma of divided loyalty aroused by dual social, national, and racial allegiance” (Campbell 25). When she realizes that Day is nothing more than a hypocrite, her physical and spiritual self rebels against the idea of marrying him and she longs to be free from “the irritation of his presence” (110). In another conversation with him, she states,

I thank God that although I was brought up and educated among white people, I have never wanted to be anything but myself. I take pride in being coloured and different, just as an intelligent white person does in being white. I can’t imagine anything more tragic than people torturing themselves to be different from their natural unchangeable selves. I think

that all the white friends I ever made liked me precisely because I was myself. (169)

In his final novel McKay “implicitly rejects white English cultural patterns and explicitly affirms black West Indian peasant lifestyles through Bita” (Campbell 28).

Bita actually follows Tolstoy’s example of turning away from the guiding influence of the intellect when she gives up the advantages of a middle-class social position. The dark-skinned peasant Jubban whom she marries is a representative of the Afro-Jamaican culture to which she returns. Contrary to Newton, a character influenced too much by Western intellect and religion, her marriage partner is a simple, reliable and self-sufficient peasant who is “not at all related to the world of intellect” (Van Mal, 51). Named for “that healing plant of Jamaican folk medicine,” he is “an exemplary character” who embodies virtues of Afro-Jamaican culture (Cooper, 49). Even though she could have picked someone of a higher class and education as a husband, her deep love for her people and their land explains the choice that she makes.

In his last novel McKay rejects colonial ideology and argues for the importance of his native roots. His voice is heard through Bita, who is proud to be a “Negro girl,” and a beautiful, “worthy human being” (266). Her return to *Banana Bottom* shows the triumph of the peasant Jamaican culture over the peaks of British education. The heroine’s predilection for the peasants presents an alternative to colonial rule and a challenge to a global commodity culture. Bita’s choice of the folk is not just a romantic preference, but an alternative that represents a connection between Bita’s personal liberation and a political affiliation (Nicholls, 83-84). *Banana Bottom* is an example of fiction rooted in indigenous Caribbean reality that presents an explicit connection between aesthetics and national politics.

In conclusion, Claude McKay deserves respect and admiration because of the importance and value of his work. He is neither P.S. Chauhan’s colonial Jamaican who was never able to dislocate himself from “his true emotional geography” (69) nor is he just a Harlem Renaissance writer who stood up for the rebirth of the African culture in the United States. He is a more complex author who turned to Russian literature of the nineteenth century in his search for a particular Afro-Caribbean mode of self-expression and became one of the pioneering creators of Caribbean literature. His lifelong spirit of independence and his refusal to compromise his artistic ideals as well as his commitment to honesty are remarkable. Despite his wanderings around the world, he never ceased to love his homeland and tremendously contributed towards its development.

The Russian literary example of the nineteenth century and especially

that of Tolstoy are important in the analysis of McKay's work and his production of a type of art different from the previously-established Western European norms and standards. Parallel to Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy, who took pride in their culture and background embedded in common people, McKay contested the "positive" effects of Western rationalism and individualism, took pride in the black masses and affirmed the importance of Africa within his Caribbean identity. While in *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* he affirmed the West Indian notion of double consciousness and pointed to the importance of African roots, in *Banana Bottom* he solved the prevailing conflict of the first two novels and created an integrated protagonist rooted in her Jamaican culture and traditions. Parallel to his Russian predecessors, he rejected the notion of art for art's sake, became a literary spokesman for the cause of the oppressed, and integrated his writing with the everyday life of Caribbean and African American people.

## NOTAS

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- 1 In his introduction to *Harlem Shadows: The Poems of Claude McKay* (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922), Max Eastman narrates McKay's delight in listening to stories about his Madagascar ancestors who managed to stay together by declaring a strike on the auction block.
- 2 The Russian work *durak* that McKay uses in *Banjo* is translated as "the fool" in English. Ivan Durak or Ivan the Fool is a Russian folkloric character that often outwits those who consider him a fool.

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