

Notes for *The Man Who Lived Underground* and “Memories of My Grandmother”

The textual notes below are intended to be used in conjunction with the Note on the Texts found at the back of *The Man Who Lived Underground* (New York: Library of America, 2021). The reference numbers denote page and line in the volume (the line count includes headings).

THE MAN WHO LIVED UNDERGROUND

5.4–5 It was . . . paid off.] In pencil, Wright put a line through this sentence on the ribbon copy of his 199-page typescript. The pencil mark reveals Wright in thought. He had considered including an opening scene between Daniels and his white employer, Mrs. Wooten. Had he done so, this sentence would have been unnecessary. But Wright did not resolve the issue and did not incorporate this material into his late working draft. Wright wrote several treatments of this opening scene, which survive as separate fragments. In one of these versions, Mrs. Wooten asks Fred Daniels whether he knows the Black Communist writer who published the novel *Native Son*. Daniels responds by saying, “I don’t agree with men like that. I think we colored folk are solving our problems . . .”

6.26–27 “He’s clean, Lawson . . . the car.] This sentence is struck in ink on the carbon copy of the typescript. It is retained here because the next sentence assumes Lawson has been identified by the narrator. Wright’s subsequent handwritten emendations to the carbon copy are all made in ink.

42.16–19 “The . . . b-b-baby . . . crestfallen air.] Struck by Wright on the carbon copy, these lines are retained for clarity.

46.19–23 His body stiffened . . . words meant.] Wright put a line through these three sentences on the carbon copy and on top of these strikeouts wavelike scribbles, suggesting he may have second-guessed his initial decision to strike this material. The sentences are retained for clarity.

47.5–16 As he spoke . . . was time.] On the carbon copy, this paragraph has both strike-throughs and scribbles that suggest Wright may have reversed his initial decision to strike the material. The paragraph is retained here to avoid an obvious lacuna.

50.18–22 the police car . . . slip of moon.] The top of p. 58 of the carbon copy contains numerous marks that make Wright’s intentions difficult to discern. Here, for continuity, the text follows his emendations beneath both scribbles and a large X.

59.10–13 impact of the rod . . . scuttling stream.] Wright’s intentions for these sentences are unclear. Here, the text follows Wright’s emendations beneath a scribble covering the concluding part of the paragraph (top of p. 69 of the carbon copy). Wright retained the vivid image of the grizzly body spinning in the scuttling stream for the published short story version, and it is retained here.

65.20–23 The tiny eyes . . . soundless cry.] At the top of p. 79 of the carbon copy, Wright put a wavelike cross-out through this sentence, perhaps suggesting its provisional nature. He retained the vivid image for the story version, and it is retained here.

69.1–3 He looked . . . electric wire.] Here, on p. 85 of the carbon copy of the 199-page typescript, Wright’s handwritten

emendations come to an end. They continue, in both ink and pencil, on the ribbon copy.

81.25–82.2 [of bills . . . his lips.] At the top of p. 101 of the ribbon copy, beginning with the words “of bills,” a wavelike scribble, in ink, covers the conclusion of the paragraph. What if anything might have replaced these lines is not indicated. Here, the text follows Wright’s emendations in ink beneath the scribble.

84.27–85.17 [there was something . . . did not know.] At the top of p. 105 of the ribbon copy, a large pencil scribble covers the concluding part of the paragraph. Beneath the pencil scribble, Wright emended his typescript in ink. Additionally, the reverse side of p. 105 contains a handwritten emendation of sixty-some words, to be inserted in the middle of the paragraph. Wright may have intended to further revise this episode in the meat market. Here, the text follows Wright’s underlying emendations in ink, except for the revision on the reverse side of p. 105, which repeats verbatim language that appears later in the typescript.

90.13–90.29 [What place is this? . . . up another.] On p. 112 of the ribbon copy, Wright crossed out the references in this paragraph to the real estate and insurance agency, possibly with an eye toward conflating the different episodes in the real estate agency and those that take place in the jewelry manufacturer (as he would later do in the short story version); however, he did not remove later mention of the real estate agency. The references to the real estate and insurance agency are retained here for continuity and to avoid the necessity of more intrusive editorial intervention.

96.5–96.23 [The walls of money . . . after all.] In ink, Wright put a large X through the first seven sentences of this paragraph on the ribbon copy, and in the margin of p. 120 of ribbon copy

he wrote, “He stretched out upon the ground and [his] highly charged emotional state resolved itself into sleep.” He may have intended to return to this part of the narrative to revise it. This material is retained to avoid an obvious gap in the narrative.

98.26–99.9 slowly mounting . . . to sleep.] On p. 123 of the ribbon, Wright scribbled loosely, in ink, over the second part of the paragraph, beginning with “slowly mounting.” Here, this material is retained.

99.17–100.4 Gradually he . . . one left.] Wright’s intentions in this paragraph are unclear. He scribbled over part of the second half of the paragraph on p. 124 of the ribbon copy, without indicating how Daniels arrives upstairs on the shop floor. This material is retained to avoid a gap in the narrative.

110.28–111.20 The intensity . . . glorious triumph.] This paragraph extends over pp. 135–136 of the typescript. On p. 135 of the ribbon copy, Wright scribbled in pencil over the paragraph beginning with part of the third sentence. This material is retained to avoid a gap in the narrative.

113.23–114.1 He felt that soon . . . VIII] In ink, Wright scribbled loosely over the final paragraph of Chapter VII and the numbered title for Chapter VIII, perhaps intending to eliminate the chapter break here. If so, he did not renumber the subsequent chapters. This material has been retained.

119.1–119.14 He turned . . . the dark.] On p. 145 of the ribbon copy, this paragraph has a large pencil scribble covering Wright’s emendations in pen. Likely, Wright intended to revise this material. Much of the language in this paragraph mirrors language he chose to include in the published short story version, and it is included here. The Library of America text follows Wright’s emendations in pen beneath the pencil scribble

except for the first and last sentences of the paragraph, struck by Wright but retained for narrative continuity.

135.12–17 [up and saw . . . temporarily forgotten.] On the ribbon copy (p. 162), this material is covered beneath heavy pencil marks, beginning with “up and saw.” Wright retained this information about the Hartsdale Station in the published short story version, and it is retained here.

136.16–24 [“Yes, sir . . . three policemen.] Wright struck this material in pencil on the ribbon copy (top of p. 165). It is retained here to avoid an obvious gap.

147.1–11 [“Come on . . . coat and cap.] On the ribbon copy (p. 179), Wright struck these lines in pencil. They are retained here for continuity. The text follows Wright’s emendations in pen beneath the pencil marks.

MEMORIES OF MY GRANDMOTHER

165.11–12 [William James, Reinhold Niebuhr, Waldo Frank] Here, both the earlier and later revised typescripts of “Memories of My Grandmother” read “William James, Niebuhr, Frank, et al.” First names have been added for clarity.

168.5–26 [“You see, Granny . . . between us.] Compare with the same episode described in *Black Boy (American Hunger)*, Chapter 4.

169.28–29 [Yet, I think . . . grew up.] This sentence was emended, slightly, for clarity.

177.5–10 [a series of moving pictures . . . persons invisible.] Based on the H. G. Wells novel of the same title, *The Invisible Man* (1933), directed by James Whale and starring Claude

Rains, was the first of the Invisible Man movies produced by Universal Pictures. Its success spurred the sequels *The Return of the Invisible Man* (1940) and *The Invisible Woman* (1940), all of which came out before Wright undertook *The Man Who Lived Underground*.

185.1-2 [advent of surrealism on the American scene.] When the grand exhibition *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* debuted on December 9, 1936, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, it brought new attention to surrealism in America. Organized by MOMA director Alfred Barr, Jr. (1902-1981), the 700-object show was a succès de scandale. The exhibition closed at MOMA on January 17, 1937, four months before Wright moved from Chicago to New York, but the show was widely reviewed and discussed.

185.18-21 [One might argue . . . the American Negro.] In the shorter, revised typescript of "Memories of My Grandmother," this sentence begins with the conditional clause "If the Negro and surrealism are linked, then one might argue. . . ." Here, for clarity, the sentence has been emended in consultation with the earlier typescript.

197.7-11 [It is only when . . . artistic communication.] This sentence was emended slightly for clarity.

197.12-13 [One day this summer . . . a long novel—] Wright refers to his long, unfinished novel, *Black Hope*, which he had put aside in the summer of 1941 to work on *The Man Who Lived Underground*. See also the Note on the Texts, pp. 221-224 in the print edition.

197.22-27 [an account . . . comfortable room.] The account Wright refers to is "The Crime Hollywood Couldn't Believe," by Hal Fletcher, based on a report given by Lieutenant C. W.

Gains of the Los Angeles Police Department (*True Detective*, August 1941). *True Detective* was a pulp magazine concentrating on true crime stories; it popularized the genre and at its peak in the 1930s and 1940s the magazine sold over two million copies a month. See also the Note on the Texts, pp. 221–222 in the print edition.

197.29 Governor Olson of California—] A Democrat, Culbert Levy Olson (1876–1962) was elected as the twenty-ninth governor of California on a New Deal platform, from 1939 to 1943. He was defeated in 1942 in his reelection bid by Republican rival Earl Warren.

200.17–21 Fred Daniels throws . . . dying for.] This sentence was emended slightly for clarity.

201.25–28 First, I noticed . . . his personality.] Emended slightly for clarity.

203.4–6 She reared . . . them healthy.] Emended slightly for clarity.

205.24–206.2 once in my life . . . experiences inconceivable.] Wright had been a member of the Communist Party in Chicago for several years when he found himself accused in 1936 and 1937 of betraying the party. His break with the Communist Party is described at length in Chapters 19 and 20 of *Black Boy* (*American Hunger*).