

Paris has at last “gotten” me: Gwendolyn Bennet in France, 1925-6

Writer, artist, and journalist Gwendolyn Bennett (1902–1981) was an active contributor to the vital period of artistic activity among African Americans commonly known as the Harlem Renaissance. Bennett published work with the leading magazines of the period, including *The Crisis*, *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life*, and the influential if short-lived arts magazine *Fire!!* Some of the greatest writers of the period—including Langston Hughes and Jean Toomer—counted Bennett among their closest friends. After studying at Columbia and Pratt Universities and teaching design and painting at Howard University, Bennett received a fellowship to study at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1924. Living in France among a creative community of American expatriates, Bennet wrote letters asking friends to send copies of the latest books by writers in Harlem. She promised to help smuggle a copy of James Joyce’s censored novel *Ulysses* to New York and recounted meeting Ernest Hemingway and other soon-to-be prominent writers at social gatherings. When she returned to New York after more than a year in Paris, Bennett worked as an editorial assistant at a prominent magazine and wrote a regular literary column at another. Throughout her life, she continued to support African American arts and culture as a member of the Harlem Artist Guild, as a member of the Board of the Negro Playwright’s Guild, and as the leader of the Harlem Community Arts Center.

Photograph of Gwendolyn Bennett, 1924, Claude McKay Papers; Norwegian-American Line Stateroom Keys & Luggage tags, undated; subscription receipt and change of address notice from *The Crisis*, 1926; Langston Hughes, “Hotel Boy,” 1926, Gwendolyn Bennett Papers. *The Crisis*, March 1924; Gwendolyn Bennet, letter to Harold Jackman, January 11, 1926, James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection; Gwendolyn Bennet, letters to Langston Hughes, December 2, 1925 and 1926, Langston Hughes Papers

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No, you won’t receive “Ulysses” soon for I haven’t sent it yet. ...I shall have to make a camouflage cover and as yet I haven’t gotten around to it. ... By the way, Sylvia Beach has brought out another printing of “Ulysses” that has the same blue cover that the first edition had for luck – James Joyce being Irish and believing in the luck that goes with number 7.

Gwendolyn Bennett to Harold Jackman, January 11, 1926, in response to his request for a copy of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, then banned in the United States

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Paul and Essie Robeson were here for the first week in November. ...I horned in on all the wonderful places to which they were invited. Chief among them were the teas at Sylvia Beach’s at which none other than James Joyce, Arthur Moss, Lewis Galantiere, Ernest Hemingway, and George Antheil were present...tea at Gertrude Stein’s and of course everybody was there; and the tea at Matisse’s home...After it was over I was very much the Cinderella sans slipper.

Gwendolyn Bennett to Langston Hughes, December 2, 1925

Objects

Crisis March 1924 – cover by GB?? <https://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/3520462>

JWJ A +C8689 27 (161) Copy 1

DL: <https://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/3520462>

Crisis Subscription receipt w/ Paris address

JWJ MSS 106 Box 2 Folder 22

Ebony Flute – March 1927

JWJ MSS106 Box 2 Folder 15

DL: <https://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/4628956>

Photo of Gwendolyn Bennet, 1924

JWJ MSS 27 Box 18 folder 562

DL: <https://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/3544014>

Norwegian-American Line Stateroom Key / luggage tags

JWJ MSS 106 Box 2 Folder 22

Letter to Harold Jackman, January 11, 1926

JWJ MSS 114 Box 1 Folder 19

DL: <https://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/4708254>

<https://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/4742399>

Letter to Langston Hughes December 2, 1925

Letter to Langston Hughes 1926

JWJ MSS 26 Box 14 Folder 317

DL: <https://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/4738944>

Poem by Hughes 1926

JWJ MSS 106 Box 1 Folder

<https://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/4246061>