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A 'lost crowd'[1] : Reconfiguring the Harlem Renaissance as a post-war "lost" generation.

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, for black Americans the First World War did not signify the traumatic removal of traditional Victorian ideals, the end of any romantic notions of battle, or, as it would for white American literature, the disillusionment and alienation of a literary Lost Generation. Although experiencing continued racism upon their return, the recognition that black Americans had received in wartime France came to characterize a budding enthusiasm for the social prospects of the post-war era. Yet, many novels of the Harlem Renaissance certainly resonate with the disillusionment of the Lost Generation and similarly grapple with notions of war trauma and traumatic post-war (re)integration into a chaotic American society. This article therefore considers the endeavour to reconcile feelings of post-war national unity with the African American struggle for racial equality in the early twentieth century. By evaluating the analogous themes of alienation, masculinity and place represented by both the Lost Generation and Harlem Renaissance this paper seeks to highlight traumatic parallels between post-war literatures of two divergent "lost" generations.

When Walter Mosley's African American private-eye Easy Rawlins divulges in *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1990) that: 'I signed up to fight in the war to prove to myself that I was a man' (1990: 54) he identifies the crux of the problematic relationship between black masculinity, war and the position of the African American post-war novel. Mosley's depiction of a black war veteran not only highlights African American soldiers in contemporary literature but also interrogates the origin of Rawlins' antecedents in the Great War. The black experience of the First World War demonstrates that the Lost Generation, with its traumatic war experiences imprinted within its literature, were not the only cohort "lost" in American society; black writers were equally disillusioned, and as a similarly "lost" group articulated their frustrations

and experiences of the war in an equally disenchanted manner. This article seeks to illustrate the resonant "meaning" of the war for black Americans as a quest for recognition by evaluating the analogous themes of alienation, masculinity and place as depicted by writers of the Harlem Renaissance. This will demonstrate that black writing likewise resonates with, and problematically furthers the complex post-war expectations and trauma experienced by the Lost Generation.

In order to read African American texts in relation to the preoccupations and themes adopted by their contemporaries it is essential to keep in mind the soldier's experience of the war, be they black or white. While white war veterans endured an America unsympathetic to the plight of its war-traumatised soldiers and hence produced literature that encompassed a sense of civilization in crisis, black soldiers in American literature reveal the additional trauma of re-integrating into a community in which they had never been fully integrated; a community in which their sacrifices made in the name of citizenship and national acceptance were consciously crushed. Contrary to idealistic hopes, the First World War failed to eliminate the traumatic and racist prejudices facing black Americans. In fact, it intensified racism, as witnessed during the 1919 'Red Summer' race riots, a consequence of demobilizing black and white veterans and the competition for employment. Not only did the war not signify for black writers the disillusionment and alienating nature of modernity of the Lost Generation, but it set apart African Americans writers in the 1920s. Instead they became a separated "lost" generation on the basis of skin colour and endured a devastating experience that denied them the expected reintegration into American society after the war. Disbelieving of continued discrimination despite their sacrifices for "democracy" abroad, black Americans experienced a contradiction between the ideals for which they had fought and the social prejudice they encountered upon their return. As Stephen A. Reich notes: 'The metaphor of a war for

democracy' and 'the heroics of Black troops in France' provided a powerful basis for action (1996: 1482).

Utilizing the themes of alienation, disillusionment and reintegration so stark in the work of Hemingway, Dos Passos, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner amongst others, the literature fashioned by African Americans in the post-World War One era highlighted their sacrifices in war as a means of challenging their exclusion from normal American citizenship. Combining the brutally racist legacy of slavery with the violence of the war, African American writers created a unique form of "war" literature that employed war as the platform upon which to fight their battle for citizenship, emphasising the dedication of the black soldier and war veteran as a worthy citizen with which to challenge existing racial tensions.

As with the Lost Generation, the African American "war" novel may be defined as any work that depicts the behaviour of its characters distorted by warfare. Accordingly, in relation to the inter-war period, McKay's *Home to Harlem* (1928) and *Banjo* (1929), White's *The Fire in the Flint* (1924), Jessie Redmon Fauset's *There is Confusion* (1924), Rudolph Fisher's "City of Refuge" (1925) and "High Yaller" (1925) and Edward Christopher Williams' *When Washington Was in Vogue* (originally serialised as "Letters of Davy Carr, a True Story of Colored Vanity Affair" in *The Messenger* in 1926), are all examples of African American works reconfigured as "war" literature.

For many young black writers of the post-war Harlem Renaissance, therefore, the war presented the same challenges as it did for whites; to liberate themselves from their European Victorian ideals. For the black writer this meant a further opportunity to rebel against the rules of polite black society. The rejection of European ideals and increased pride in "blackness" and traditional African cultural values, or *Négritude,* as it became known, played a key role in stimulating the uniqueness of African American culture in the 1920s. Like

the Lost Generation, *Négritude* originated in France and established solidarity in a common black identity as a rejection of national racism, arguing that the shared heritage of members of the African Diaspora was the best tool in fighting white political and intellectual supremacy over black culture.

Echoing the agenda of the Lost Generation, Jean Toomer observed in 1935 that 'there has occurred something similar to what swept the youth of the entire country after the World War – a breaking away from old codes and conduct, the release of a "free wild spirit," flaming youth, not a little drinking and sexing' (qtd. Summers 2004: 155). The lives and work of Toomer, Charles Gilpin, Claude McKay, Nella Larsen, Wallace Thurman and Countee Cullen provide evidence of the stylistically original, innovative, and modernist markers associated with works of the Lost Generation (including a fondness for alcohol). Likewise, many black characters in post-war literature are also 'lost' in ways that resonate with the white literature of the era; for example, Nella Larsen's female protagonist Helga Crane in *Quicksand* (1928) becomes disconcerted with her life and is betrayed by her social entrapment through religious conversion.

The war was as much a catalyst for a black literary renaissance in the 1920s as it had been for whites. But black hopes were betrayed after the war to a far greater extent. Much of white America saw no reason to treat blacks any differently than they had been treated before the war. So, not unexpectedly, as black troops returned home a brutal spate of Ku Klux Klan lynchings, race riots, and deportations began, making it absolutely clear that black veterans could expect no reconciliation or sympathy for their war endeavours. In the court of public opinion their American citizenship was negated by the colour of their skin. In a country made paranoid by the perceived threat of Bolshevism and Communist internationalism black Americans were regarded by many as the "enemy within" and those who spoke-out on racial

issues, joined unions or advocated civil rights were investigated by the federal intelligence agencies. Black activism, as Theodore Kornweibel, Jr notes, became regarded as synonymous with communism; African Americans who spoke out for equal opportunities were usually investigated by various federal intelligence agencies (1998: xii). Black militancy therefore became fearfully regarded as 'communist-inspired, and that it was particularly directed towards achieving "social equality"' (Kornweibel 1998: xii)

Despite their profound disadvantages, many black writers of the era warrant recognition as a "lost" generation (or even an "abandoned" or "invisible" generation) separated from the white literary tradition of the time by their unique cultural agency. George Hutchinson observes that debates surrounding the relationship between modernism and the Harlem Renaissance 'often pit black writers against white writers like Eliot, Pound, and Stein, who inhabited a very different space… in the modernist landscape, while ignoring or giving little careful attention to the forms of uncanonical "native" (white) modernism with which the African American renaissance was intimately related' (1997: 14). Ultimately, Hutchinson continues, 'We end up with a binary model of racial literatures reinforcing the dominant structure of American racial discourse and repressing the various forces at work during the Harlem Renaissance to assail and dismantle that structure' (1997: 14).

Studies of dominant (i.e canonical) literature in the early twentieth century have largely excluded African American writing, and the outcome has been the segregation of "blackness" from any sense of "Americanness". During the inter-war period, African American literature effectively existed as a 'black hole' (Hutchinson 1997: 14). And as Ralph Ellison would note much later in *Invisible Man* (1952), his task became, 'one of revealing the human universals hidden within the plight of one who was both black and American...' (2001: x1), an observation that resonates with the plight of black Americans after the First World War. While

white soldiers were culturally, socially and psychologically disjointed in the post-war era, black writers became similarly symbolically "lost"; deprived of cultural grounding, stability, and a positive reception which they believed would greet them upon their return from the battlefield. Instead, African Americans in the 1920s, set apart for centuries on the basis of skin colour, became, as Claude McKay noted in *Banjo* (1929) a 'lost crowd' (2008: 208). While Ann Douglas believes that the post-war era 'was the first hour of real hope for the Negro in America' (1996: 88) it can be argued conversely that it actually demonstrated a moment of dislocation similar to that of the Lost Generation; a brief instant in which African American literature became linked to the concept of a generation "lost" to war and the failure of (re)integration into American society.

However, the discrepancies between the Lost Generation and the "abandoned" black generation far outweigh the similarities, especially when writing on the topic of the war itself. The figure of the soldier and veteran, and the representation of war, is significantly different in the works of white and black writers. In the work of Hemingway, Dos Passos and others, the war's chaos and brutality are explicit and unequivocal, discussed (and oftentimes recounted from personal experience) in explicit detail and horror. The violence of war in many of these works plays a major function in demonstrating revulsion of warfare and the psychological scarring imprinted upon its victims. Stanley Cooperman declares that, 'A combination of horror, dehumanization, numbness, and absurdity is the heritage that World War I novelists brought back from their broken world of combat and military glory' (1967: 97). Combined with this was the belief that the, 'total violence, machine civilization, futile terror, and mass death could not be…simply accepted' (Cooperman 1967: vii). The impact of World War I was incomparable; it shattered social and cultural space in the United States shaped

the literature of a generation. It was the Great War which conferred upon America a literature effectively "created" by war.

Displaying the trauma represented by the Lost Generation, the unnamed soldier's plea in Hemingway's *In Out Time* characterizes the horror that veterans brought home:

> Dear jesus please get me out. Christ please please please christ. If you'll only keep me from getting killed I'll do anything you say… Please please dear jesus (1996: 63).

Echoing this, in Walter White's *The Fire in the Flint*, a novel that follows the return of a black war veteran physician to Georgia and the racial problems he encounters, Dr. Kenneth Harper remarks:

> The war was too big a thing, to terrible and too searing a catastrophe, to be adequately comprehended.. [the men were unable] to realize the immensity of the event into which they had been so suddenly plunged (1996: 42-3).

Described as a 'terrible nightmare' his war experiences are relived once more 'in fitful memories as of some particularly horrible dream' (White 1996: 42-33, 44). And similarly to Hemingway's "Soldier's Home" the reluctance of the veteran to discuss his experiences presents an obstacle to any solid sense of recovery and (re)integration. As Kenneth's sister Mamie remarks: 'Ken has had all sorts of exciting experiences, yet he has come home and we can't get him to talk about a thing…' (White 1996: 77). The failure to acknowledge the traumatic experience, and the reluctance of veterans to discuss their encounters (even obliquely) is nevertheless a prominent connection with the post-war suffering of the Lost Generation.

In black literature the war is more of a presence and takes on symbolic meaning. In Rudolph Fisher's 'City of Refuge' (1925), for example – a story concerning the fleeing of King Solomon Gillis from the South to New York- the devious nature of the black war veteran Mouse Uggam suggests a Harlem inverted; where 'black was white' (2008: 36) and the

"deceitful" nature of white post-war society has been paradoxically reversed and imprinted upon the black community; a stark contrast to Douglas's declaration that the post-war era represented 'the first hour of real hope for the Negro'. While not the focus of the story, it is subtly inferred that the war plays a significant role. Mouse's veteran status and his use of French, especially, identifies him as a soldier; his rustic use of 'toot sweet' (2008: 40), representative of the French *toute de suite*, suggests an allusion to Du Bois's claim that African culture could be found in the French language as a result of dialogues between African American troops and French colonial troops on the front lines. In 1919 Du Bois noted in *The Crisis* that 'one result of seemingly secondary, but really of prime, importance should come out of this war: the American Negro should speak French' (qtd. in Whalan 2008: 55). As a result of the relative absence of racism in France and the welcome received by black soldiers, learning French symbolised a parallel aspiration for African American cultivation. Kenneth Harper's use of French in *The Fire in the Flint*, suggests a veteran seeking not one-upmanship, but parity with the white soldier experience in France: white and black experiences appear the same: 'Their most vivid memories were of… *beaucoup vin blanc* or, most frequently, of all-too-brief adventures with the *mademoiselles'* (White 1996: 43).

Yet ironically, despite France being the location for these shared principles and the hope for an African cultural "awakening," Fisher turns the positive representative concept of France on its head by using the nation as a source of the dubious drugs which ultimately cause the downfall Gillis. Duped by Mouse into distributing some 'little white pills' (Fisher 2008: 41), Gillis is persuaded to take up Uggam's job-offer and is assured of his scheme's legitimacy because 'Uggam hadn't been in France for nothing. Fact was, in France he'd learned about some valuable French medicine' (Fisher 2008: 41). The war therefore becomes not the site of optimism and affirmation, but instead a location for ruin, disgrace, and disillusionment.

In many works by Lost Generation and post-War black writers, the rural worker's adjustment to the city, race relations, and tension between social classes are all prevalent. Veterans are robbed of any recognition of "self" in the same way they are been robbed of their individuality while a cog in the nation's war machine. Peter Aichinger, in his study of the war novel *The American Soldier in Fiction, 1880-1963,* observes that the experience of World War One 'shatter[ed]… the American attitude towards warfare[,] and the mood of the literature that came out of the war' effectively became a literature of protest (1975: xxv). This undercurrent of protest encouraged many writers in the inter-war period, including African American writers to go beyond realism and to take the Great War as a metaphor for the ills plaguing the era. The virtues for which black soldiers had fought and suffered were entirely absent in the post-war world as their sacrifices evaporated in a world of cynicism and renewed racism.

Yet, while hundreds of thousands of black soldiers participated in the war, no "Negro" war novel emerged in the *immediate* post-war era to evaluate and review the heroic African American contribution. For black Americans, then, the First World War did not represent the emergence of a brutal modernity, as it had for the Lost Generation, nor did it enforce cultural pessimism. Certainly, many African Americans saw the war as a problem that did not concern them; as A. Philip Randolph noted in the *Messenger* in July 1919: 'The Huns of Alsace have never threatened the Negroes' life, liberty and property like the Huns of Alabama' (qtd. in Wintz 1996: 264). Likewise, in McKay's *Home to Harlem* (1928), Felicé defends her boyfriend Jake Brown's decision to desert the US army during the war, saying, 'What right have niggers got to shoot down a whole lot a Germans? Is they worse than Americans or any other nation a white people? You done the right thing, honey…' (1987: 331-2). And in Walter White's novel *The Fire in the Flint*, Harper notes: 'If this thing called democracy that I helped fight for is

worth anything at all, it ought to mean that we coloured people should be protected like anybody else' (1996: 68). More significantly, Harper states the real reasons why many African American men enlisted during the war was not 'for an abstract thing like world democracy,' but because 'they entertained very definite beliefs that service in France would mean a more decent regime in America, when the war was over' (White 1996: 43).

Although Jennifer C. James argues that war is a 'spectral presence' (2007: 8) in post-World War One African American literature, in the works of many writers such as Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*, the war, although seemingly 'spectral', is nevertheless at the forefront of the protagonists story in much the same way as F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* (1920) and Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926). Aichinger's assertion, therefore, that a "war novel" comprises of written work in which the lives and actions of the protagonist are largely affected by warfare (x) allows for the theme of war, like that of the Lost Generation, to be brought home with the soldier (or at least away from the field of battle). War, consequently, becomes a theme integral to both white and black literature since it remains indelibly imprinted in the minds, actions and behavior of the protagonists.

With the war and later Depression, both the writers of the Lost Generation and Harlem Renaissance held an important theme in common: making sense of a world into which they felt they could fully (re)integrate. The inability of African Americans to fully engage the distinctiveness and entitlements that came with being "American", despite sacrificing much in the name of American democracy, caused black cultural producers in the 1920s to treat the war as perhaps the key occurrence for considering the disparity that existed in black American identity. And for this, as James has noted, 'War promised to be one ground upon which black manhood could be created' (2007: 12).

II

　　While many of the later writers of the Harlem Renaissance had been too young to enlist, Walter White and Claude McKay were of age by the onset of the war in 1917. Although neither fought, this did not disqualify them from writing about the war in the same way that William Faulkner and F. Scott Fitzgerald had done without being excluded from the Lost Generation. Instead, as Ann Douglas notes, 'The issue was one of interest, not experience or eligibility' (1996: 88).

　　The Lost Generation was therefore epitomised by F. Scott Fitzgerald's character Amory Blaine in *This Side of Paradise* (1920) as those who spoke for American youth. Blaine said: 'Here was a new generation… grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken' (Fitzgerald 1971: 270). Michael Parish claims that these were men who 'struggled to define the relationship between their craft, their lives, and their place in society in the aftermath of the Great War' (1994: 184). However, many of the emotions that exemplified the Lost Generation – alienation, disillusionment and reintegration – were equally disturbing to African Americans, and black and white writers produced works keen to examine the social experience and after-effects of the Great War.

　　Traditional notions of war's romanticism and the masculinity associated with combat have consistently appealed to African Americans as an opportunity to gain inclusion into American society. During the Civil War, for example, black soldiers believed that their efforts to secure the Union posed an opportunity to demonstrate their loyalty to the United States and thereby gain full citizenship. Similarly, during World War One the post-war literature utilized the masculine war novel as an opportunity to display their political and societal anxieties. James declares that many African American writers 'intentionally refer to traditions

and themes from the dominant culture's nationalist war narratives, imprinting them with black social and political concerns' (2007: 19).

There is, however, one notable difference to the writings of the dominant culture: there was no masculinist counterpart in white war literature. No work of white fiction during this era displayed the same social angst and political challenge towards the dominant culture as did African American writing.

Instead of a site of terrible horror and realisation, as witnessed by the Lost Generation, African American "war" novels offered instead a platform to demonstrate manhood and masculinity, both tied to traditional notions of acceptance, integration and ultimately equality. In light of the pervasive threat of lynching and mob violence during the pre- and post-war era which sought to control aggressive black male sexuality and often shockingly incorporated castration, any bold actions for freedom became a potentially hazardous action. Because 'the legal and customary practice of segregation functioned to produce a precarious sense of manhood among blacks' (Summers 2004: 3) the black "war" novel offers an opportunity for black protagonists to demonstrate their bravery and mount a challenge for acceptance and integration; it offers a deeper, multifaceted, more complex (and ultimately more problematic) understanding of the war's impact upon American society.

Traditionally in American literature, as Lauren Berlant has observed, 'the *white*, male body is the relay to legitimation' (qtd. Spillers 1991: 113). Yet in the works of many black writers of the era, violence against "white civilization", as demonstrated by the shooting of the white man that instigates King Solomon Gillis's flight to Harlem in "City of Refuge", is seen as a vehicle for change. Symbolically implying that black (re)action against white society triggers black cultural unity, Gilles notes his reasons for coming to New York: 'The shooting…

simply catalyzed whatever sluggish mental reaction had been already directing King Solomon's fortunes towards Harlem' (Fisher 2008: 36).

The struggle to convey the African American experiences to a white audience is problematic in the post-War era because the literature reflects more complex and challenging concerns directly associated with black social anxiety. Yet the use of war nevertheless allowed black writers to "seize the moment" to affirm notions of a black "self" and "place" in society. And so, the soldier who triumphs over racial injustice in the post-war era is a reflection of the aspirations that black society had anticipated with the Armistice.

Although W.E.B. Du Bois's claimed that black military service constituted a 'slavery of uniform' (1986: 1180), it can be conversely argued that the motivation behind black enlistment was to display a body (in American military uniform) that the nation would accept as "civilized" and therefore "American". With this in mind, the war that many African Americans believed did not concern them can be seen as a medium through which the body of the black solder/veteran mounts a challenge to the dominant traditional narrative of the Lost Generation.

Yet, as demonstrated by McKay's short story "The Soldier's Return" (1922/23), a sense of manliness is not always achieved. Describing the return of soldiers to small-town Georgia following the war, the story is a microcosm of the larger national reaction towards returning veterans of the war, both black and white. While white soldiers are afforded welcoming committees and pillars of the community are 'on hand in order to give a triumphant welcome to the proud, victorious warriors' (1977: 36), black soldiers are not afforded the same appreciation. The white community dominates the "space" and freedom of movement afforded to citizens of the town in order to offer a victorious parade to their returning soldiers,

their defenders of democracy. By contrast, however, the black soldiers that arrive 'two weeks later, on the four o'clock train',

> had been given permission to walk along the main street of the white section, and the whites marched from behind closed shutters and quietly snickered. Then the marchers stopped in front of the mayor's house, and the mayor came out on the veranda and made a speech in which he welcomed the black "boys" who had returned to the front. He declared that the war was over, and so now they must take off their uniforms and return to the work which they had done before the war (1977: 37-38).

Here, the mayor reintroduces racial limitations by restricting the space and freedom of movement that black soldiers believed they had earned, and stresses the importance for the black population to return to the place they held in pre-war society. Similarly, in a sign of belittling the spirit of the returning soldiers they are 'given permission' - as a superior might provide to a subordinate - to march in what is emphasized as a white area of town. The black population are forced to acquire consent in order to move in space that is not considered traditionally free to them. By identifying the troops as 'boys' instead of the masculine "men" they had aspired to be, the mayor again reinforces the pre-war racial segregation and demonstrates that black Americans are unlikely to achieve the status they sought. They are therefore denied the masculinity, citizenship and acceptance they had sought by fighting in the war.

This theme recurs in the story through the mayor's uneasy recognition of a black man in US military uniform. Having frightened the white girl Pauline, who had never seen an African American wearing a soldier's uniform, the mayor says to the black soldier Frederick Taylor: 'You know that in our town we don't like it when niggers wear soldier's [sic] uniforms. Indeed you were told that you should quickly change your outfit, but for some reason what your elders said went in one ear and came out the other' (1977: 40). Implying here that the

white community are his 'elders', the mayor continues by suggesting that Taylor is unworthy to wear the uniform, saying: 'We will take the uniform of a soldier of the U.S. off you and give you an outfit more appropriate for you' (1977: 40-41). To the mayor an African American not only stigmatises and sullies US military uniform, but with military training African Americans were perceived as a potential threat should they decide to forcibly resist and seize the opportunity of gaining respect and power; a prospect that the mayor is keen to eliminate here. Contrary to the Lost Generation who returned to the United States uncertain of their location within a transformed American society, black soldiers, as identified here by McKay, returned home to discover that their sense of "place" had remained unaltered; their hope for *re*-integration became instead part of the long-running quest for *in*tegration.

The significance of African American war literature has generally been overlooked in favour of political or social commentary. Many chose to highlight continued racial problems in society and institutions at the expense of presenting war itself. War, therefore, tends to exist in 'rather abstract terms' (James 2007: 27) instead of in the concrete and explicit expressions that are witnessed in the work of the Lost Generation. However, it can be argued that rather than embracing overt accounts of the war, which signify a loss of "place" in white literature, black writers instead chose to utilize the war symbolically to signify a combined moral righteousness, a celebration of heroism, and the much-sought-after inclusion into the national mainstream through military sacrifice. There is a subtle and restrained sense of optimism in post-war African American literature that was notably detached from white Lost Generation representations of a society left devoid of moral and spiritual anchorage. African American writers took advantage of numerous new opportunities and urban changes during the inter-war era.

Works such as McKay's *Home to Harlem* and Walter White's *The Fire in the Flint* especially offer a further understanding of the black masculinist war novel not witnessed elsewhere. The soldiers and veterans of many Lost Generation works appear hesitant to entertain relationships within society, and especially women who are often reluctant to offer sympathy to returning soldiers. In William March's novel *Company K*, for example, the reaction of Private Webster's fiancée Effie to his wounds is cold and callous. Greeting him upon his return from the war, she says, "If you touch me…I'll vomit' (1989: 156). Similarly Hemingway's reflection of the soldier's attitude towards the opposite sex is one of non-committal; although acknowledging them, the soldier Krebs notes in the short story "Solder's Home" (1925): 'they lived in such a complicated world of already defined alliances and shifting feuds that Krebs did not feel the energy or the courage to break into it' (Hemingway 1996: 71). Even when his mother encourages him to find a 'nice girl' and 'settle… down' (Hemingway 1996: 75) his response is deadpan: 'I don't love anybody' (Hemingway 1996: 76). Hemingway's characters display an extreme aversion to any form of social contact, and "Big Two-Hearted River" (1925) demonstrates the dark and damaging impact of war on a psychological level; the veteran Nick Adams becomes introverted with absolutely no desire to return to the traditional socio-economic construction of "home".

African American veterans, on the other hand, were eager to return to their former lives in the anticipation of fulfilling the promise of the war and their elevated position as a result. As demonstrated by Jake in *Home to Harlem*:

> It was two years since he had left Harlem. Fifth Avenue, Lenox Avenue, and One Hundred and Thirty-fifth Street, with their chocolate-brown and walnut-brown girls, were calling him…
> "Take me home to the brown girls waiting for the brown boys that done show their mettle over there…" (McKay 1987: 8-9)

As a veteran, 'Jake had his own daydreams of going over the top… He had enlisted to fight'

but is dismayed when his unit is seconded to build accommodation 'to house the United

states soldiers' (McKay 1987: 4), a statement that suggests white soldiers. Jake's desertion

from the Army is prompted by a sense of betrayal that black soldiers were denied an

opportunity to prove their masculinity by white officers. By deserting the military, similar to

Fredric Henry in Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), the soldier rejects notions of

nationhood in favour of neutral (in Henry's case, Switzerland) or international citizenship (as

McKay's *Banjo* demonstrates); both Jake Brown and Fredric Henry therefore reject notions of

nationhood and the mores that come with national unity.

III

While there are numerous novels that feature black soldiers in the war, Victor Daly's *Not Only*

War, A Story of Two Great Conflicts (1932) represents the only novel written by an African

American veteran of the Great War. Accompanied by the announcement in *The Crisis*: 'At

Last! The Negro Novel of the World War' (qtd. in Payne 1985: 87), the themes of sacrifice and

duty resonate strongly in the novel. As David A. Davis notes, 'If any work makes a case for

African American citizenship through military service, then *Not Only War* is it' (qtd. in Daly

2010: vii-viii).

Daly himself fought in France during the First World War as a member of the famous

367th infantry, the 'Buffalo' regiment at Camp Upton, Long Island. Later receiving the Croix de

Guerre for his service, *Not Only War* is dedicated to 'THE ARMY OF THE DISILLUSIONED'

(epigraph) and demonstrates not only the trauma of the war itself, but also the trauma of

racism exacerbated by the conditions of war; it is, as its title suggests, 'a story of two great

conflicts' in which the effects of colour and segregation within the American military are

vividly portrayed. Although he admits that 'The characters are fictional and the action is only partially autobiographical,' what makes Daly's work important as an African American war novel is its authenticity: the 'Descriptions of places… are based on actual experiences' (qtd in Payne 90). As a veteran himself Daly brings a sense of legitimacy to African American war literature since he bases the experiences of his protagonist Montgomery Jason's (aka Montie) on his own knowledge of and familiarity with the hypocrisy of war: the realisation that the war will *not* bring a much desired equality to post-war American society. As Montie notes in the wake of his court-martial by the racist white Lieutenant Robert Lee Casper for 'intruding' in the house of Blanche Aubertin, a white woman whose residence is 'reserved for… white men' (Daly 2010: 52):

> Could he ever forget that look of exultation that came over Casper's face when the sentence was pronounced? Could he ever erase from his memory the bitterness and scorn with which Casper had testified against him that afternoon?... Oh no, black people don't count (Daly 2010: 61).

Yet Montie's comment on the war itself resonates solidly with the work of the Lost Generation. In contrast with his earlier idealistic belief that 'if we roll up our sleeves and plunge into this thing… the Government will reward the race for its loyalty' (Daly 2010: 12), Montie's opinion of the conflict dramatically changes when faced with the reality of war:

> his mind travelled to the war itself, to the destruction, and suffering, and death… For what good purpose, he asked himself. Came in answer all the high-sounding phrases that lull men's reason's to sleep, and allow them to be led off like sheep to the slaughter – the make the world safe for democracy – war to end war – self determination for oppressed people (Daly 2010: 61).

In *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) Hemingway similarly sums up his recoil from the 'loftiness' of military rhetoric when Fredric Henry, after listening to the haughty remarks of his Italian comrade Gino, muses:

I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain… I had seen nothing sacred… There were many words that you could not stand to hear… Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene… (1929: 165).

Yet Montie's friend Simms foresees the outcome for black soldiers: 'No amount of sacrifice on your part or my part, will ever soften the hearts of these crackers towards us' (Daly 2010: 12) and eventually Montie also comes to realise that when talking of abstract notions such as "freedom" and "democracy" 'they didn't mean black people…' (Daly 2010: 61). Although *Not Only War* hints at the false possibility of reconciling the "race question" with description of men 'huddled together, the black man and the white, each seeking the protection of the other' (Daly 2010: 43), Daly's work is ultimately an examination of the larger racial injustices that are exposed by war and the resignation that "Prejudice was here to stay" (Daly 2010: 62). Even Casper's emotions assume a racial insinuation: "His anger was now at *white* heat and he felt like striking this insolent nigger" (emphasis added, Daly 2010: 59).

Yet of the areas covered by combat, perhaps the most significant is the landscape identified as no-man's-land. In this desegregated space, writers 'fantasized that humanistic, universal values of heroism and comradeship could be established on denationalized segregated terrain' (Whalan 2008: xvii). Despite proving deadly, this land offered an opportunity for race to be negated and reconciliation to take place. Despite being 'furious' (Daly 2010: 68) with the severely injured Casper, Montie nevertheless attempts to save the life of the man who had him court-martialled. Even Casper recognises the significance of no-man's-land as a landscape capable of ceasing hostilities; he thanks Montie by declaring 'war isn't the only hell that I've been through lately' (Daly 2010: 69), a comment implying Casper's regret at his racially motivated actions. For Montie and Casper, although they are prohibited

from living equally as Americans, they are nevertheless equally united in death as they 'resumed the struggle' (Daly 2010: 70) of life and equality in no-man's-land.

Demonstrating the deep conflict between racial identification and national identity, Madame Aubertin describes Montie as 'Un noir… un Americain,' to which he thinks: 'The world over… A nigger first – an American afterwards' (Daly 2010: 50). Montie's encounter represents a turning-point in his self-belief and triggers doubts of his nationalism, representing the dialectic in which African American veterans found themselves during and after the war. Montie's experience with Madame Aubertin highlights, 'a sense of frustration and disillusionment at the fact that his racial identity overrides his national identity' (qtd. in Daly 2010: xvi).

Similarly, in McKay's *Banjo* the protagonist Lincoln Agrippa Daily (aka 'Banjo') undergoes a similar conversion. Like the veteran Jake in *Home to Harlem*, Banjo is a veteran of the war. However, unlike Jake, Banjo served in the Canadian army, rejecting notions of his 'American' identity. Furthermore, Banjo remains in France, renounces his American citizenship and deplores his role in making not a world safe for democracy, but a 'wul' safe foh crackerism' (McKay 2008: 201). Banjo rejects his national identity in favour of embracing his racial and ethnic identity.

Unlike *Not Only War*, however, *Banjo* does not depict the war itself. James has remarked that 'Daly's sobriety distinguished him' from many other writers; 'the second half of the novel begins with a vivid portrayal of warfare unmatched in realism' (2007: 183). In fact, the second half of the story resonates more closely with Hemingway's short story "A Way You'll Never Be" (1933) in which the true horror of combat is revealed via a terrified Nick Adams. Discussing the realism of his work, Daly noted that the 'Descriptions of places,' in *Not Only War*, 'especially the troop movement up the steep hill toward the end of the novel, are

based on actual experiences which were fictionalized in hindsight' (qtd. in Payne 1985: 90).

Additionally, Daly's short stories "Private Walker Goes Patrolling" (1930) and "Goats, Wildcats and Buffalo" (1932) both have a foundation in true-life incidents.

Reflecting the terror of the war, Montie notes that 'The front was nervous… The trigger fingers of the machine gunners reflected their own nervousness… Suddenly a roar deafened… The earth quaked and vibrated from the detonation of a thousand unseen guns… Like an awakening giant, the French artillery opened up' (Daly 2010: 64-5). Yet during the traumatic scene depicting Montie's dash to the bottom of a slope housing German trenches notions of race and injustice are forgotten in Daly's narrative. The focus of Montie's efforts is simply to survive. Unlike the "spectral" war (and the racial battle) occurring in the works of McKay, White and others, for those on the front line the life-or-death encounters witnessed in *Not Only War* take fundamental precedence over all notions of race. Nevertheless, there are overt images of racial assimilation that both open and close the war section of the novel; in the first, after being surprised by 'a thunderous explosion' (Daly 2010: 41) the soldiers 'huddled there together, the black man and the white, each seeking the protection of the others body' (Daly 2010: 41); and in the second, Montie finds Robert Casper fatally wounded at the close of the novel and attempts to unsuccessfully save them both: 'Then came a sudden riveting of maxims. Two bodies slumped as one' (Daly 2010: 70).

The African American experience of World War One shows that it was not just the Lost Generation who incorporated the experiences of the war into their work. Together with the disenchantment of the canonical white Lost Generation there existed a cohort separated by colour that articulated similar disillusionment. Black veterans such as McKay's Jake Brown and White's Kenneth Harper resonate with Dos Passos's John Andrews and Faulkner's Donald Mahon in representing the 'paralyzing aphasia of modern man' (Piep 2009: 23). Yet despite

the existence of a dual discrimination in the work of black post-war writers, this is often rendered as a form of empowerment because the soldiers more readily affirm their rightful place as members of the human family and refute white America's claim that they are naturally depraved and subhuman.

However, unlike the privileged white veteran characters of the Lost Generation, for whom the war represented the undoing of their romantic notions of society, many black characters recognized it as simply another disillusioning experience within America's flawed society. The assertions of valour, heroism, and sacrifice that permeate many African American accounts of World War One therefore, become rhetorical tools in the effort against racism. As Karsten H. Piep has noted with relevance to the black American struggle: 'Americans went to war in 1917 not only against Germans in the fields of France but against each other at home. They entered on a deadly serious contest to determine the consequences of the crisis for the character of American economic, social, and political life' (2009: 9).

The First World War offered new cultural representations, political formations and experiences, and new literary and social attitudes. For African Americans these were the war's most enduring cultural legacies, propelling them forward into the twentieth century. It was an event that shaped for generations the often opposing concepts of race and nation, of ethnic diversity and national unity. Black Americans had unsuccessfully attempted to reconcile the country of their birth with their struggle for racial and social equality. Yet while African Americans may have 'struggled to convert the war to make the world safe for democracy into a fight for citizenship at home' (Reich 1996: 1504), they most certainly created a literature representative of that struggle. It was a literature comparable to that of the Lost Generation which without doubt demonstrated a reluctance to accept a continued subordinate status in post-war American society and highlighted the analogous themes of

disillusionment, location, alienation and trauma linking two divergent but equally "lost" generations.

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[1] McKay, 2008: 208

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NOTES ON THE CONTRIBUTOR

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