John Carroll University
Carroll Collected

Masters Essays | Master's Theses and Essays

2020

IGNORING THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE: THE FAILURE OF MODERNIST SCHOLARSHIP

Emily Elvoid

Follow this and additional works at: https://collected.jcu.edu/mastersessays

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

IGNORING THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE: THE FAILURE OF MODERNIST SCHOLARSHIP

An Essay Submitted to the
Office of Graduate Studies
College of Arts & Sciences of
John Carroll University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Arts

By
Emily Elvoid
2020

No matter how hard an individual critic may try, it remains impossible to study the entirety of literature. There exist too many genres and subgenres, too many variations in style and far too many millennia of people writing and chronicling for any one scholar to study within a lifetime. Of course, this vastness enriches the field — allowing for multiple interpretations of texts that grow and differentiate between one another as time passes from a work's conception; this makes literature unique from other fields of study, its ability to adapt and transform rapidly and extensively from reader to reader. Yet the fact remains that vastness makes the field as a whole impossible to conquer by any given individual. As a result, scholars divide fields into subsections as one means of mastering — or at least coming as close to mastery as possible — the conception of particular literary forms.

The most common of these subsections fall into three categories: genre, style, and time period. Genre acts as the most inclusive of the three, often dipping into the other two as it transcends the confinement and definability of any given time or style. The tales of Sherlock Holmes written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle vastly differ from the works of Sue Grafton's alphabet series, yet the two undeniably fit into the detective mystery genre. Genre focuses on commonalities between works in terms of tropes, character archetypes, and plot structures that ultimately form a familiar pattern no matter when or how an author writes the story. Style proves itself to be more concise. Instead of looking at commonalities within a genre, style focuses on the forms by which people conceptualize their world. For instance, scholars often define Romantic literature by its floral language, the important emphasis on nature, the presence of supernatural influences even within the complexities of industrialization.[1] Time period remains the most

[1] That is not to say that style remains entirely separate from time period. The style of any given period often derives from a single section in time due to historical influences, such as Romanticism stemming as a result of the Industrialization of the world during the 17th century. However, much like genre, style extends beyond time. Yeats'

definable and clear cut of the three categories insofar as it defines distinct start and end dates that parallel major historical events. Victorian literature begins at the start of Queen Victoria's reign and ends a few years after her death. Within a given set of years, time reflects societal values characterized by specific historical events. Even as these three categories establish broad subsections in which scholars divide literature, many crossovers exist among the three that create even smaller sections. The process of relevant literary scholarship hinges on the examination of how the small contributes to the large; thus, understanding grows proportionately across all fields of literature.

A problem occurs when a system of exclusion infiltrates this natural subset within literatures. Such an exclusion is evident when one studies the Harlem Renaissance as it relates to the movement called Modernism. When critics define Modernism and the works that meet its criteria, the Harlem Renaissance finds itself excluded from the genre and from significant critical analysis. If included at all, Harlem Renaissance writing is often treated as an addendum to Modernism despite its own literary success and parallel contributions. Instead of creating a clear distinction between greater areas of study, this artificial differentiation between "modernist" works and those of the Harlem Renaissance only works to perpetuate the exclusion of Black American authors with the field of modernist criticism. As a further indication of a double standard within the genre, "high modernist"[2] works consistently borrow major themes and movements from the Harlem Renaissance.

"Lake Isle of Innisfree," for instance, which many consider a Romantic poem, was published nearly 30 years after the end of the Romantic era.

[2] By "high modernist," I reference works that modernist critiques consider the peak of Modernism due to the techniques the authors incorporated into the works and the influences the works had on the other literature of the period.

DEFINITION OF THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

The Harlem Renaissance refers to a literary movement in twentieth century America that — as the name implies — originated in Harlem City, New York and spanned roughly from the end of World War I to the 1930s.[3] During this period, hundreds of Black artists flocked to Harlem in the aftermath of the Great Migration. Seeking salvation and opportunity in the North from the persecution and racism running rampant in the South, many Black Americans settled themselves in urban cities in hopes of escaping the oppression of the "Old Negro"[4] mentality. In her work *The Harlem Renaissance: A Very Short Introduction*, Cheryl Wall proclaims Harlem the "dream capital of Black America" and the "physical embodiment of the spirit of the New Negro;" Harlem contributed to the cultural growth of New York City as it became over a relatively brief time a mecca for *all* Black artists to gather (44-45).

Of the numerous creators present during the movement, the most influential and recognizable are Langston Hughes, Nella Larsen, Claude McKay, and Zora Neale Hurston — each producing pivotal literary works that defined a generation of Black authors and captained the New Negro movement. Often, critics refer to this era as one in which Black American culture thrived and became mainstream to its White counterpart. Wall calls it the era in which the "Negro was in vogue" where society existed as a "combustible mix of the serious, the ephemeral, the aesthetic, the political, and the risqué" (1-2). Yet, as Wall continues, the Harlem Renaissance constituted a time where Blackness became the latest fashion in a fleeting society; it saw the complete rebirth of Black arts where "Black people redefined themselves and announced their

[3] Some critics extend the conclusion to the late 1940s, but the majority of scholarship focuses on works produced in the twenties and thirties.
[4] This moniker, while born later from the Harlem Renaissance philosophy of the *New Negro* by Alain Locke in 1925, refers to the stereotypical image of the enslaved Black man subservient and inferior to his White brethren in the South. A major part of the Harlem Renaissance would stem from breaking apart from this image.

entrance into modernity" (3). It was the time where Black creators faced society and revolted against the expectations and stereotypes it forced upon them. This time became one of "disruption [to] traditional social arrangements and values" — it became *the* centralization of arts and philosophy within the Black American community (Wall 3).

The Harlem Renaissance found itself as the unconscious reaction to the Great Migration and the increasing persecution Black Americans faced at the hands of white supremacist groups. As a result, the mass of people moving North sought a means to better themselves and break away from the expectations and restrictions southern society imbedded in them. Yet when removed from the southern environment, Black Americans faced an identity crisis. During the enslavement of Africans and later Black Americans, southern society had carefully and thoroughly stripped any form of self-identity beyond the moniker of slave. For years Black Americans believed themselves as lesser — became indoctrinated to believe so and faced a systematic stripping of anything that could help them think otherwise.[5] So, once removed from the South and placed into the more liberal North, Black Americans were at a loss of how to define themselves outside of those prejudices. In hopes of doing so, they turned to philosophies urging for a reimagining of the Black American and their role in society. Specifically, they turned to W.E.B. Du Bois and Alain Locke.

In 1903, Du Bois published *The Souls of Black Folk* in which he created the theory of Double Consciousness defined as the "peculiar sensation […] of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks in in amused

[5] Olaudah Equiano describes such a stripping of identity in his seminal work *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Or Gustavo Vassa, The African* in which he describes the before and after images of the African man during the Middle Passage and after years of abuse at the hands of slavers. Daniel Mannix and Malcolm Cowely further cover this systematic stripping by looking at the institutional systems put in place by slavery such as the Middle Passage and slave auctions in their work *Black Cargoes.*

contempt and pity" (689). This conception put into words the friction Black Americans faced when attempting to redefine themselves in a "free" society. Du Bois' theory of Double Consciousness, despite the fact that his book appeared two decades before the start of the movement, acted as a catalyst Harlem Renaissance artists built upon — taking the idea of a split perception of Black man as he knows and the Black man society deems him to be under white-controlled ideals, and using that distinction to urge Black Americans to fight against such perceptions. Alain Locke acted as the leading force among these artists with the publication of his anthology, *The New Negro*, in 1925 and his essay of the same title. Within this essay, Locke first coins his idea of the "Old Negro" of the South — "more of a myth than a man" born from and "perpetuated as an historical fiction partly in in innocent sentimentalism" (971). Locke argues that this image acts as a suppression to a Black American's true potential. His solution is the New Negro, or the concept that Black Americans cast off the role White society placed on them and embraces a confident unapologetic attitude of Blackness while rebelling against tradition. Gone was the "Old Negro" and instead came a representation that accurately portrayed the role in society and the potential Black Americans had as a race. Locke and Du Bois' philosophies became the backbone for the Harlem Renaissance as artists adopted and embodied the fierce identity of Blackness for its contrast to the domineering White society. Artists embraced this embodiment by breaking with or experimenting with tradition until it represented the new ideal of Black modernity. These philosophies and goals mimicked those found in Modernism.

DEFINITIONS OF MODERNISM

Occurring during the Harlem Renaissance, Modernism — or the birth of modern literature — gained momentum among both British and American authors. During this

movement, literature diverged from the traditional rigid structure of Transcendentalism and the overly floral and detail-oriented prose of Romanticism and shifted towards experimentation and artistry. Modernist authors embraced narrative techniques such as stream of consciousness, and they rejected emphasis on the real and realism within literature in favor of the abstract. At the same time, these authors became disillusioned with the glitz and glam of society and technology after the fall of World War I and the devastation it wreaked on humanity. The works categorized within this literary movement share themes of societal disillusionment, the breakdown of the traditional "hero" figure (especially the hero as soldier), the overall decay in societal morals and — at times — the complete dissolution of order. Notable authors from this era include T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Virginia Woolf, all of whom produce works that critically became "High Modernist," or pique examples of the Modernist genre. However, while there exists a consensus over what constitutes high modernist, the broader title of Modernism becomes trickier to define by critics.

Unlike the Harlem Renaissance which defines itself within a set time span, the definition of Modernism fluctuates between scholars and researchers due to its emphasis on abstraction and experimentation among a wide variety of major authors. Peter Childs in his latest release of *Modernism*, cites the ambiguity within Modernism as a result of the connotation and variations of the word modern. Specifically, he argues that the root word "modern" associates with the avant-garde in which modern refers to the "radical, progressive, or revolutionary" forms of art, an assumption that became "the catalyst for the coinage of 'Modernism'" (Childs 12). At the same time, the word modernity "describes the rise of capitalism," the "social study of state regulation [and,] the belief in progress and productivity leading to mass systems of industry" (16). Therefore, if Childs is correct, modern refers to the idea of experimentation and

differentiation from the "typical" both in terms of society and societal expectations. Juxtaposed, modernity refers to an industrial form of adaptation and departure from tradition. Where modern emphasized a new form of thought, modernity pushes for new application of that thought within industry and the structure of society — linking heavily toward the concept of production in effective and innovative ways. When he combines these two understandings of the term, Childs explains Modernism as "an aesthetic and cultural reaction to late modernity and modernisation" of the world at the turn of the twentieth century, or the marriage between new forms of thought and the implementation of those thoughts (17). Modernism in terms of literature, then, refers to poetry as the "break from the basic pentameter as the basic unit of verse;" and to prose as the "associat[ions] with attempts to render human subjectivity in ways more real than realism" via "internal monologues, stream of consciousness, tunneling, defamiliarisation, rhythm, [and] irresolution" (3).

In conjunction with Childs, Michael Whitworth echoes a similar definition of modernist literature in his essay "Rhythm, Form, and Diction in Modernist Poetry."[6] He states that "Modernist writers were self-mythologizing" with "much in their critical writing emphasiz[ing] their discontinuity with the immediate past" that "serves to obscure connections" between their works and tradition (Whitworth 4). Whitworth points to the "late nineteenth century Symbolist movement" as a "contribut[or] to the modernist interest in the power of new verse form" where a "poem should communicate at a level that is nonrational and non-verbal" (16). Much as Childs denotes a value of "realer" realism within modernist authors, Whitworth remarks upon a similar phenomenon within irrational and nonverbal communication that transcends the conscious mind

[6] Whitworth's essay focuses on the poetic form of modernity rather than the broader category of Modernism that Childs tackles; however, the techniques he analyzes in relation to poetry presented in his work apply to Modernism as a style and technique of literature beyond the poetic form.

and speaks to the subconscious. Childs' and Whitworth's definitions hold true when one examines the literature produced by high modernist authors such as Joyce, Woolf, and Faulkner, yet applies just as well to Joseph Conrad and Katherine Mansfield, the majority of whose works predate the Modernism period. Thus, even with Childs' clarification of the term Modernism, the exact parameters of where the Modernism movement begins and ends remains debatable.

Criticism divides into two camps when defining Modernism: the movement as a style of art that roughly begins with the turn of the century[7] and ends with the works of Samuel Beckett who died in 1989; and the movement as a time period that spans from the late nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century with the 1920s acting as the peak of the movement. The latter definition — often called periodizing — provides the movement clear start and end dates that narrow the scope of literature for closer study among scholars. David Chinitz and Gail McDonald employ this definition when compiling *A Companion to Modernist Poetry*. While acknowledging the "particularly thorny problem" that comes with periodizing Modernism, they conceptualize Modernism as an "expressive culture to a particular global modernity — one associated with […] the final phase of Western imperialism, first-wave feminism, the political and ideological developments of two world wars" and the "drastically altered landscape shaped […] by the Cold War" (1).[8] While the exact dates of Modernism may vary from scholar to scholar, the period begins with the birth of the "global modernity" most often associated with the close of World War I in 1918 and extends to the fall of World War II and the start of the Cold War in the 1950s. This definition encapsulates both the works of the High Modernist writers and

[7] Usually in reference with the works of Joseph Conrad

[8] While Chinitz and McDonald do go on to explicitly state that they do not believe their definition of Modernism to be the "most" correct or even widely accepted — going as far as encouraging their readers to disagree with their logic and approach — they ultimately fall on the side of Modernism as period rather than style for sheer pragmatism and manageability, echoing the original purposes of classifying literature in the first place.

artists, such as those by Joyce and T.S. Eliot, as well as the major social changes Childs describes within his definition of modernity.

On the other hand, defining Modernism as a form of artistic style rather than a time-based genre includes authors that miss the time span yet still embody and display the defining characteristics of the modernist genre. However, using a parameter of style proves tricky because the flexibility an author possesses in creating a narrative style makes pinning down a concrete definition of a modernist style difficult at best. Typically, critics may use the descriptor of "difficult" in relation to the modernist style, but the term remains too simple of a substitute for the complexity of Joyce's mental deconstruction of Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and Benjy's narrative in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. However, the removal of style from the definition of Modernism, as Chinitz and McDonald would claim, erases "inclusion […] that may seem anomalous to those for whom particular form of experimentalism are a sine qua non of modernist art" (1).

For the purpose of this study, both Modernism as period and as style will be implemented and combined in order to create a clear comparison between the modernist and the Harlem Renaissance movements — particularly with how both define and claim certain literary works under their purview. Therefore, the definition of Modernism as it applies to this discussion will be as follows: literary works that span from the start of the twentieth century to the start of the Cold War in the 1950s; works and authors dedicated to the experimentation of their art form in contrast to the previously established tradition; and works that provide an introspective look on humanity. In conjunction with such a definition, the key literary tactics and themes of Modernism become stream of consciousness, emphasis upon and experimentation with language, and the conception of man and his role to society.

This definition, while combining the two major conceptions of Modernism, also encompasses the ideals and specifications of works present within the Harlem Renaissance. Yet, while both the movements occur simultaneously — and are often physically juxtaposed in the case of American Modernism — critics treat and study the fields in isolation by viewing them as separate phenomena. Michael Bibby reveals the depth of this separation in his article "The Disinterested and Fine: New Negro Renaissance Poetry and the Racial Formation of Modern Studies," when he examines the statistics of 2011's Modernist Studies Association (MSA) conference. He concludes that of the 354 presentations held, only 5 or 1.5% of the total were on New Negro authors; he continues by citing that since the conception of *Modernism/Modernity*[9] in 1994, only 13 articles "indicate a focus on a New Negro writer" and not until 2003 did the journal feature any New Negro poets (Bibby 492-493). The absence of the Harlem Renaissance — specifically its New Negro artists and authors — in one of the most important modernist journals among scholars showcases how far removed the Harlem Renaissance resides in the eyes of Modernism scholarship.

THE INTERSECTION OF MODERNISM & THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

In some respects, the movements do prove themselves as separate, especially when looking at the Harlem Renaissance through a racial perspective. One cannot separate the Harlem Renaissance from race; it is impossible to do so because the literature produced and the artists involved within the movement not only racially identify as Black, but the work they produce centers around the concept of Blackness and the Black identity from the perspective of Black Americans; thus the movement cannot be separated from its racial perspective. However, despite the movement's indisputable ties with race and Blackness in America, those ties do not mean

[9] The MSA's official journal founded by Robert Van Hallberg and Lawrence Rainey (Bibby 492).

that race is its *entire* identity. Jane Kuenz calls the movement "authentically *American*" despite such ties (507). Kuenz's statement, while simple and seemingly obvious, highlights a crucial tension authors of the Harlem Renaissance combatted against: the misnomer that Black and American were exclusive. The New Negro philosophy aimed at destroying the image of the Old Negro, yes, but it also called for the undeniable recognition that Black Americans were Americans. One need look no further than Langston Hughes' "I, Too" and its ending assertion of "I, too, am America" to see the yearning for recognition (18). So yes, scholars dividing and categorizing literature based on racial factors reasonably separate the Harlem Renaissance from Modernism, but scholars of Modernism cannot do the same because they cannot make a similar claim of racial division. The two major definitions for Modernism fall either into the category of style or time period — no mention of race or ethnicity or even continent applies. Therefore, according to such definitions, Modernism does not pertain to any single race but rather looks at literature from a perspective of technique or time. Even if scholars applied those definitions to the Harlem Renaissance in hopes of separating it from Modernism, they find themselves faced with a double standard. McKible states as much when he argues that "Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance, however named or defined, were part of a cultural moment when open, transgressive, and multivocal talk became recognized as vital and valuable—as the very mark of being modern" (430).

In fact, one could argue that Modernism acts as a Black American tradition within the Harlem Renaissance. In her essay "African American Women Poets, The Harlem Renaissance, and Modernism: An Apology" Melissa Kemp argues that "Modernism belongs to no one culture, race, or country of origin; conceived in both contemporary terms and during the Harlem Renaissance, it is as distinctly American as it is African American" (792). While borderline

controversial,[10] the truth of Kemp's statement remains. Modernism cannot claim origin in race or country, hence the debate among time or style as its only means of definition. To borrow Kemp's words, the literature and study "conceived" in Modernism and in the Harlem Renaissance share a commonality that makes the two near indistinguishable when looking purely at the concepts and terms that comprise Modernism. Therefore, nothing prevents the application of the definition of Modernism to the Harlem Renaissance as a means of examining the justification for excluding the movement when talking about Modernism. Returning to the definition of Modernism for this study, the overlap between the Harlem Renaissance and Modernism occurs within three major categories: time, experimentation of literature, and themes. Of the three categories, time is the most obvious overlap. Ranging between the start of the twentieth century — with World War I in 1914 acting as the key spark of Modernism — until the 1950s, each movement produced some of its most critical works during the 1920s. These works include T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" in 1922, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* in 1925, Alain Locke's *The New Negro* in 1925, Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* in 1927, James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* in 1927,[11] and Nella Larsen's *Quick Sand* in 1928. The 1930s would see further growth in both movements with the publication of Langston Hughes' *Not Without Laughter* (1930), William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* (1930) and *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937).

This era also cultivated the creation of little magazines as the hub for modernist creators to converse and showcase their works. For the typical "modernist" these magazines began with

[10] "Controversial" in reference to Modernism's long history of excluding Black authors from its studies as stated by Bibby in "The Disinterested and Fine: New Negro Renaissance Poetry and the Racial Formation of Modern Studies."
[11] While this work was originally published anonymously in 1912 by Johnson, the work did not gain traction until its republication in 1927 during the Harlem Renaissance where it found immediate success. Additionally, by attaching his name to the novel, Johnson gained fame as a Harlem Renaissance giant.

the publication of *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* in 1912 and expanded with T.S. Eliot's *The Criterion* founded in 1922, Ezra Pound's *Blast* in 1914, the *Egoist* in 1919, and the *Dial* in 1840.[12] The magazines of the Harlem Renaissances included W.E.B. Du Bois' *The Crisis* in 1910, Wallace Thurman and Zora Neale Hurston's *Fire!!* in 1926, and *The Messenger* in 1917. In terms of time period, the Harlem Renaissance and Modernism experience clear overlap not only in the amount of "high" works published during the short few decades but in how these works blossomed from smaller magazines that proved crucial to the works' circulation among the community. Modernists depended on these magazines because traditional ones refused to publish the experimental and jarring form of their medium while the Renaissance faced rejection by major American publication companies due to the censoring of Black authors common at the time. Aderemi Bamikunle cites as much in his essay "The Harlem Renaissance and White Critical Tradition" when he proclaims that "It [this rejection of Black literature] is in the way in which the general pattern of White criticism of Black writing helped to shape the development of the Harlem Renaissance" (81). In fact, this dependence on magazines for publication highlights an overlap of style and form found with the movements.

THE EXPERIMENTATION OF LANGUAGE

Childs marks Modernism as the era of the radical and the freedom of tradition, or one defined by rule breaking and experimentation (2).[13] Bibby agrees as much when he states that "as an aesthetic, modernism […] is understood by […] an impulse to 'make it new'" (494). The methods of making literature "new" are as plentiful as they are diverse. Ezra Pound sought to make literature new through language. In his 1913 essay "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste," Pound

[12] The Dial started as a magazine focused on American Transcendentalism but became a staple of American Modernism in the 1920s.

[13] Child is referencing Malcolm Bradbury in this particular passage from the work *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*.

defines the idea of Imagism or the practice of using precise images in poetry as a means of transcending the written word. Within this essay, he claims that literature — specifically poetry — must rid itself of all "unnecessary" language until only the true image of what an author writes remains (Pound). He called for a fearless endeavor into abstraction rather than constraining oneself to iambic rhyme schemes or verse. His poem "In a Station of the Metro," a work heavily referenced among modernist scholars, exemplifies this barebones structure with its two lines of distinct images: a crowd of people and petals on a "wet, Black bough."

Wall echoes a similar position when she describes the Harlem Renaissance as "risqué," a word embodying the same connotation as radical and experimental (2). However, unlike Pound's Imagism movement urging for a reduction of unnecessary language, Harlem Renaissance artists experiment with language by writing in a Black vernacular. More commonly referred to today as African American Vernacular English, Black vernacular features phrase and speech patterns of enslaved Africans and Negro spirituals. Miriam Thaggart agrees with Wall's conclusion in *Images of Black Modernism: Verbal and Visual Strategies of the Harlem Renaissance* when she states that "Black modern emerges […] between the materiality of the body evoked by stereotypical representations of Blackness, such as 'Negro' dialect, and the intangibility of other forms of Black expression, such as the spirituals" (Thaggart 3). Essentially, this idea of modern and experimental comes from looking at the "intangible" or as Childs would call it, the abstract. Black vernacular acts as that form of abstraction born from past language previously ignored and bypassed by White authors.

Jean Toomer uses such vernacular in "Cotton Song" with phrases such as "We aint agwine t wait until th Judgment Day!" and "Nassur; nassur," (9). Langston Hughes utilizes the vernacular in "Weary Blues" when the pianist croons how he "ain't got nobody but [him] self"

and is “gwine to quit [his] frownin’ / And put [his] troubles on the shelf ” (19-22). However, Zora Neale Hurston reigns as the queen of Black vernacular in the Harlem Renaissance as she heavily utilizes the vernacular in the dialogue present in her novels and short stories. Additionally, much like Pound wrote “A Few Don’ts,” Hurston defines the ways in which Black vernacular develops and is utilized by Black authors in her essay “Characteristics of Negro Expression.” Within this piece, Hurston breaks the vernacular down in to several categories — similar to “A Few Don’ts” — and echoes Pound when she iterates that her essay only acts as “the most general rules” of the dialect but cannot describe a step by step process for achieving the dialect within one’s writing (1062). Hurston’s attempt at guiding and teaching her contemporaries about vernacular demonstrates how she experimentally shifts language from the traditional English used by a White society to a “risqué” English found within Black communities. In fact, Wall describes the use of vernacular as what allowed authors such as Hurston, Hughes, and Toomer “to experiment with language and make it new as Ezra Pound was urging White modernists to do,” and he points out that “Black modernist[s] recognized the ‘new’ in the old oral traditions that had never been part of literature” (106). While critics may disagree with the latter half of Wall’s statement — in particular the use of a tradition as “new” — the fact remains that the tradition belonged within Black American communities and enslaved Africans, a population largely ignored and criticized by literature and a dominant White society; thus critically speaking one must strike Black vernacular from the categorization of traditional. Yes, the vernacular stems from the “old,” but by mainstreaming the dialect and interweaving it within the “traditional” English, Black American authors make it new just as T.S. Eliot makes

traditional allusions in “The Waste Land” new with the juxtaposition of Eastern and Western philosophies[14] to create a singular narrative.

THE LOST GENERATION & THE HEROIC IMAGE

Language is not only the method of experimentation modernist and Harlem Renaissance writers utilize; they also questioned and transformed the concept of man. More specifically, they reimagined the ideals of manhood in the aftermath of World War I. For Modernism, this reimagination relates to the concept of “Lost Generation,” a term coined by Gertrude Stein but made famous by Ernest Hemingway in his 1926 novel *The Sun Also Rises*. The moniker describes the generation of men and women in the years during and after the war; typically it associates with the image of a war-weary and mentally distraught soldier returned from war and on the periphery of society, unable to comprehend or sympathize with the horrors of the warfront he left behind. Literature focusing on the war from the soldier’s perspective often criticized the idealized heroic figure war propaganda pedaled to the public. Wilfred Owen’s “Dulce et Decorum Est” acts as the most famous example of this literature when he famously calls the heroic image “the old lie” in face of the brutality and death that awaited men on the warfront. However, the leading modernist in combatting this image of the heroic soldier of war was Hemingway who centers a majority of his novels around what critics call the Hemingway Hero.

The Hemingway Hero is a character archetype of a hyper-masculine yet understated male figure returning from war who finds himself suffering from a deformity (mental or physical) that symbolizes the obstacle he must overcome to retain his masculinity. In *The Sun Also Rises*, the Hemingway Hero is Jake Barnes, an ex-soldier suffering from impotence which affects his

[14] Specifically, I draw on Eliot’s use of the Fire Sermon and St. Augustine’s Confessions within the third section of the poem — the Fire Sermon a distinctly Buddhist tradition of cleansing oneself from the flames of desire and Augustine’s plea for God to remove him from temptation.

intimate relationship with Brett. In *A Farewell to Arms*, the hero is Frederic Henry, a paramedic wounded on the active war front in Italy who suffers from crippling psychological and emotional numbness that bleeds into his life and relationship with Catherine. In either case, both men challenge the traditional image of the war hero as they suffer direct effects from war that take away a facet of their masculinity rather than bolster it. In the case of Jake, it is his inability to have sex with the woman he loves; for Henry it is the ability to love altogether and inability to provide Catherine with the emotional support she craves in the aftermath of her fiancé's death. When compared to the idyllic image of the soldier returning from war, both men seem "broken;" yet it is their brokenness that Hemingway uses as the catalyst for each of his novels and qualifies his work as modernist for the challenge to the expected ideal. Instead of war making a man heroic, the Hemingway Hero asserts his own heroism by facing the obstacles placed in front of him — i.e. the physical or mental wound from which he suffers — directly and alone. Heroism then stems from man's ability to recognize and conquer personal trauma rather than the senseless killing and violence found at the warfront. Hemingway thus takes the concept of the "Lost Generation" and morphs it into the image of a broken man adrift in a chaotic society.

The Harlem Renaissance reflected a similar notion when artists wrote about the Black American. To borrow the words of Kuenz, these artists "in the face of assertions (sometimes their own) about primitive culture and identity of Black Americans […] argued for the value of African American expressive forms of the basis of distinctive racial 'genius' that created them;" they would be both "authentically Black and authentically modern" without a compromise on either identity and "refused to recognize these terms as mutually exclusive" (509). Thaggart calls the Harlem Renaissance the "period when Black writers and artists experimented and took narrative risks in the representation of African Americans," a time of the New Negro in the face

of a White society that observed them as subservient and lesser (5). These artists' challenge to identity is reminiscent of the Hemingway Hero insofar as they subvert societal expectations and ideals about men. Where Hemingway wanted with his heroes to showcase the aftermath of war's impact on man and masculinity, Claude McKay wrote poems like "If We Must Die" and "To the White Fiends" that feature speakers rebelling against the image of the subservient negro by condemning the societal prejudices that perpetuate such stereotypes. Langston Hughes poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" proclaims a pride in African heritage and the strength that comes descending from a race strong enough to survive the horrors of slavery. While boosting Black confidence and promoting Blackness as an acceptable and respectable identity, the Harlem Renaissance called for a complete recapturing of the identity of the Black American. These Americans were not stereotypical Mammys or Uncle Toms born from the idyllic images of Antebellum South. They were not nameless and expendable bodies the government could turn a blind eye to as hate groups targeted and murdered them before crowds of people. They were loud and distinctive. They were a people born of ancient rivers with roots planted deep within America as well as in Africa. They were Black and American too. And just like Hemingway and his hero of the Lost Generation, this mentality issued partly from World War I.

Like most men at the beginning of the war, Black men were eager to enlist and participate in World War I. In fact, one could argue that Black men were the *most* eager to fight in the war due to a perception of the war as a means of proving themselves as Americans. Farshid Nowrouzi Roshnavand and Rajabali Askarzadeh Torghabeh claim that Black American men "pinned their hopes upon the promise that their patriotic service in the cause of war would help them win approval, recognition, and equality in the mainstream American society" as they had for the Civil War (40). This belief was so common among Black men that by the conclusion

of the war in 1918 “more than 365,000 Black Americans were enlisted” with “more than 200,000 of them dispatched to Europe” to fight on the front lines; and while a majority of these soldiers fought in the lowest-ranked units, they did so with a pride and conviction that America would welcome them with open arms upon their return (Roshnavand and Torghabeh 41). The reality did not meet those expectations. When these soldiers returned from war, battle worn and “respected by the French and feared by the Germans,” they found nothing but contempt waiting for them in America; instead “no U.S. Medals of Honor were granted to Black troops” and people began conducting studies seeking to “prove that Blacks were physically ineligible for combat duty because their brains were considered to be smaller than Whites” (42). Racism reached all new highs with Black veterans suffering the brunt of that inflation. While America met White veterans with celebration and admiration, in 1919 alone 77 Black veterans “were lynched, ten of whom were […] still in uniform” (42). While devastating and horrific, this treatment of Black veterans sparked the revolution within Blackness and Black identity.[15] Armed with the confidence and pride these men held during World War I and outraged at the ignorance and hatred from their White brethren, Black Americans began rejecting that projection of inferiority and wrongness society taught them. They decided to fight a war back home.

In this retaliation, the Harlem Renaissance created its own Lost Generation. Sarah Trott argues as much in her article “A ‘Lost Crowd’: Reconfiguring the Harlem Renaissance as a Post-War ‘Lost Generation.’” She claims that the works focusing on war produced in the Harlem Renaissance “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”

[15] That is not to say that WWI marked itself as the chief catalyst for the New Negro Movement of the Harlem Renaissance nor the rise of Blackness. Not all men went to war and women were excluded entirely yet headed the forefront of the New Negro. What I mean here is that WWI acted as the spark that pushed many over the line of tolerance towards the racism running rampant in the country.

(Trott 434). However, unlike the Lost Generation's disillusionment in a society removed from the preconceived notions of the Victorian age — mainly those born in heroics and patriotism — disillusionment for Black Americans took shape in their challenge to the continual exclusion from equality and citizenship. Yet, despite these different forms, both contained themes of alienation. The Hemingway Hero found alienation in society after war robbed him of his masculinity. The New Negro felt alienated within a White society that not only deemed them lesser beings but actively sought their destruction. The Lost Generation condemned society for its frivolity and disingenuity. The Harlem Renaissance condemned society for its double-standard and ignorance. These Black artists combined the alienation of the Lost Generation with the animosity and drive to define oneself in the face of societal expectations and stereotypes leftover from a society pre-World War I. Thus, the Harlem Renaissance reveals itself as the perfect marriage of modernist ideals and techniques.

Yet, some critics may reject designating these artists as members of the Lost Generation because they did not participate actively in the war. The majority of combat happened during the youth of many Harlem Renaissance artists and those old enough — such as Claude McKay — abstained from fighting. However, the embodiment in these younger writers of the post-war mentality and fatigue that accompanied the Lost Generation veterans proves undeniable. One need looks no further than McKay's poems "Outcast" and "The White House" to see as much. In "Outcast," McKay depicts a speaker "out of time," a person torn between the unbreakable connection to his ancestral home and the hostile climate in which he currently resides (14). Not only does the speaker feel disconnected from the world as he "walk[s] the way of like a ghost," but in that disconnection a piece of him "is lost, forever lost" (9-11). These lines showcase both the alienation of the Lost Generation as well as the loss the Hemingway Hero suffers at the hands

of war (9-11). McKay's "The White House" only furthers this sense of alienation by juxtaposing a gleaming house with "doors of glass" closed in the speaker's "tightened face" — an image representative of the intangible barriers between Black Americans and advancement in society (1-8). The speaker becomes the outsider — the unwanted barred from the "shine" of the glass door (8). McKay also captures the internalized anger the New Negro felt towards this rejection and forced alienation, describing the speaker as "sharp as steel with discontent" (2). Clearly, to deny McKay's qualification as a writer of the Lost Generation would be ludicrous.

As Trott points out, "William Faulkner and F. Scott Fitzgerald" never fought in the war but neither were they "disqualif[ied] […] from writing about the war" nor did it "exclude [them] from the Lost Generation," so why should the lack of fighting exclude the artists of the Harlem Renaissance (440)? The answer is simple: it should not. The Harlem Renaissance meets every definition, expectation, and classification of Modernism, no matter how scholarship defines the movement. The Harlem Renaissance is an extension of Modernism that shifts away from the focus of White America and Anglo Saxon Europe and instead looks at how modernity and the modern emerged within the minority. The Renaissance looks at how Black American became the contemporaries to high modernist writers like T.S. Eliot and William Faulkner and developed the same modernist techniques and experimentation in a different light. The evidence clearly indicates that the works of Harlem Renaissance writers must be an essential part of modernist studies. However, it would be one-sided to argue that the Harlem Renaissance mirrors similarities to Modernism; the reverse is also true. Modernism draws on two characteristics fundamental to Harlem Renaissance works: the pariah and the cultural influence of jazz.

THE EXCHANGE OF BLACK THEMES

While most scholarship consider the movement a literary phenomenon, the Harlem Renaissance acted as a cultural center for musical arts — giving rise to musical geniuses such as Duke Ellington, Josephine Baker, and Louis Armstrong in addition to revolutionizing the art of musical invention with jazz. Jazz acts as the crucial point of intersection between Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance. While not invented during the Harlem Renaissance — its origin extends back to the end of the nineteenth century — jazz contains a past deeply rooted in Black American and African heritage and was crucial to the development of art in the period. Born from the negro spiritual that inspired blues and the experimentation of rhythm in ragtime, jazz blossomed as the era's main genre of music. Just as literary artists flocked to Harlem in the 1920s, the number of musicians grew as new music venues opened around the city to host a variety of acts both White and Black. When the Cotton Club opened in 1923 in Harlem and began hosting Black musicians such as Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong, both jazz artists and observers of jazz blossomed, and experimentation with jazz doubled. Once Black musicians broke down the brass-centered structure of traditional jazz with the Harlem stride piano, [16] improvisation ruled over jazz — no two performances or performers were quite the same as artists changed the tune or adlibbed in the middle of shows. The wild and chaotic rhythms produced as a result of such uniqueness inspired many Harlem Renaissance poets.

Langston Hughes stands out among the many poets drawing from jazz as inspiration — the majority of his poems either focusing on jazz playing or jazz musicians or including lyrics from jazz pieces. The most obvious example of this representation occurs in his 1923 poem

[16] Typically shortened to a stride piano, the Harlem stride refers to the technique in which the left hand plays the "oompah" rhythm of ragtime and the right played the song's original melody and the improvisations the artists incorporated (Morrison).

"Jazzonia." While the title alone demonstrates its tie to the music genre, the poem mimics the rudimentary structure of a jazz song. Specifically, the repetition of the lines "O, silver tree! / Oh, shining rivers of the soul!" acts as the steady melody of the poem with the speaker returning to them time and time again while the interjecting stanzas represent the improvisations a jazz musician makes on the tune (1-2). Hughes demonstrates a form of adlibbing in the closing lines; "In a whirling cabaret / Six long-headed jazzers play" parallels the poem's second stanza "In a Harlem carbaret / Six long-headed jazzers play" (3-17). The changing of the word "Harlem" to "whirling," while small and easy to overlook, showcases how the lines of the poem change as it progresses — not removing its original form, but making it new and different just as the Harlem stride piano did to jazz.

Hughes parallels the jazz form more overtly in "Dance Africaine," with the poem's use of ellipsis and alternating line lengths. By including these variations, Hughes creates a visual representation of the rhythm slowing and rising in a jazz tune and mimes as well the sway of a dancing body. The juxtaposition of "Low… slow / Slow … low" with "Stirs your blood. Dance!" showcases this difference in tempo the best — the use of the ellipsis drawing out the first two lines while the soft repetition of the words "low" and "slow" decelerates the poem's pace; pairing that slowness with the image of blood stirring and the single exclamation of "Dance!" causes an abrupt change in pacing which represents the body and rhythm snapping to life once more (3-6). These poems are only two examples of how closely Hughes incorporates jazz into his poetic form. While it may not be present in all his works, jazz remains pivotal to the structure and form of Hughes' poetry, not to mention the poetry of many other poets and artists in the

Harlem Renaissance.[17] Claude McKay pays homage to jazz in his poem "The Harlem Dancer," while, in *Passing*, Nella Larsen utilizes the presence of jazz clubs as background for the glitz and glam of high Black society. Jazz is everywhere in the Harlem Renaissance, both within its literature as well as within the culture surrounding those creating it. Such interlocking makes separation of the two impossible.

In addition to its close relationship to Black culture in the Harlem Renaissance, jazz found remarkable success among White modernists. Due to a reliance on experimentation and adlibbing mid-performance, modernists — especially those in Europe — came to see the musical genre as the reflection of the change and innovation they hoped to create in literature. These modernists likened jazz to a "form of musical liberation" that remained elusively undefinable yet impacted the arts in drastic measures (Anderson 135). As jazz music became the backdrop to Harlem Renaissance, it did the same in such modernist works as F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* where jazz became attached to the theme of the wealth and decadence implied in Gatsby's parties. On the other hand, jazz music did not meet immediate success and acceptance in White American society.

In the essay "The White Reception of Jazz in America," Maureen Anderson chronicles the increasing criticism jazz faced between the years 1917 to 1930 when jazz started "rising on radio waves and appearing in clubs worldwide" — criticism based in "political and racial concerns" of people who wanted "to express their dislike of African Americans" (135). Common critiques included references to the "strangeness" of the word jazz, the "obvious" parallels to devil worship and the uncultured savagery of Africa, and the overall nonsensical

---

[17] Virginia Whatley Smith covers this topic in her essay "The Harlem Renaissance and its Blues-Jazz Traditions" in which she argues how novels produced in the Harlem Renaissance mimic the exact structure of the Blues-Jazz musical form.

nature of the music as it paid homage to the "Mumbo Jumbo" god (136-137). To these critics, jazz was not a musical form but rather an extension of Black Americans. And while one cannot separate the two entirely, if at all, the "critiques" published focused *only* on the racial connections rather than the musical form. Despite the racialized criticism the genre faced, jazz prevailed among the general populace and continued growing exponentially until its White audience even started adopting and claiming the genre as their own. As Anderson concludes in her essay, critics turned from demonizing the genre to rationalizing its apparent Whiteness — citing arguments such as: since "jazz instruments are not African" then "the jazz music played on [them] cannot possibly be African American" — until, ultimately this tendency led to the eventual theft of jazz and its relabeling as a White byproduct (144). F. Scott Fitzgerald acts as the biggest perpetrator of such a phenomenon.

Fitzgerald's association with jazz is both well-known and documented among scholars. The author often cited himself as one of the key pioneers in what he called the "Jazz Age." He claimed his literary work as the building blocks for the high society he portrays in *The Great Gatsby*. In fact, history attributes Fitzgerald as the source of the term due to the collection he titled *Tales of the Jazz Age* whose stories centered around high society and the "elite" socialites. While Fitzgerald's influence on the age proves undeniable for literature produced in the 1920s — especially with the publication of *The Great Gatsby* in 1925 — his work largely ignores the cultural influence of Black America (and the Harlem Renaissance) on the society he writes about. *The Great Gatsby*, while set in New York during the twenties, contains zero mentions of the Harlem Renaissance yet references jazz multiple times. The absence only becomes more notable when looking at how the novel borrows and utilizes one of the major themes of the Harlem Renaissance: passing.

In her essay, “White Skin, White Mask: Passing, Posing, and Performing in *The Great Gatsby*,” Meredith Goldsmith argues that Fitzgerald’s seminal work acts a passing novel[18] with the character Jay Gatsby acting as the White equivalent to the tragic mulatto archetype present in the traditional passing tale. Specifically, she claims that “Gatsby’s success lies in his ambiguously ethnic, White, working-class origins” and in turn that success acts as the “imitation of African-American and ethnic modes of self-definition” (443). By this Goldsmith argues that the way Gatsby abandons his past as a means of achieving economic wealth and social prestige reflects the abandonment Black Americans did if they were able to pass as White. She compares Gatsby with the unnamed narrator of James Wheldon Johnson’s *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, looking at how each character “perceive[s] ‘personality’ as an ‘unbroken series of successful gestures’” to “[gain] access to leisure-class America by adapting their appearances and manner to Anglo-American ideal;” she cites the gifting of tailored clothes to the narrator in *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* and Gatsby’s shirt throwing scene as the main parallel between the two arguing that “the imitative qualities of Gatsby’s clothing […] ironizes his efforts at originality” while also exposing his “compensat[ion] for his lack of familiar lineage” or prestige (445-447).

While Goldsmith’s comparison between the two characters reveals a deep connection of passing in both novels, she ignores how the motivation to pass irrevocably separates the two. Gatsby passes himself off as a wealthy upper-class gentleman for the personal gain of social standing and the grandiose image of his “best” self. Nick reveals as much when Gatsby confides in Nick about his past; Nick theorizes that Gatsby “invented just the sort of Jay Gatsby that a

[18] The passing novel follows a bi-racial character (usually White and Black) who has a fair complexion and finds themselves torn between the racial stigmas of being Black yet looking White. This format gets its name from the way these characters “pass” as White in society to avoid racism and at times even death.

seventeen year-old boy would be likely to invent," or that the persona Gatsby adopts reflects the internal desires of his teenage self, complete with the desire to rid himself of the poverty plaguing his family (Fitzgerald 79). The narrator of Johnson's novel does not share a similar self-serving motive for passing but rather an instinctual one born from survival instincts. For most of the novella, the narrator does not have a firm conception of race — his complexion is fair enough to pass as White yet he retained a firm connection in Black and White communities. In fact, the narrator spends his time traversing between the two communities with little to no issue, thus negating the need to consciously pass.[19] It is only near the novella's conclusion that the narrator makes a firm decision to pass and it only happens as a result of witnessing the live tarring and lynching of a Black man in the South (Johnson 136-137). Terrified of such a fate befalling him, the narrator hides among the White elite and passes for the rest of his life.

Despite the connection of passing in *The Great Gatsby,* Goldsmith's comparison of these characters reveals that her argument falls short when one analyzes the motivation for passing. Just because Gatsby fails to align with the narrator of *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* does not mean the novel's connection to passing is misaligned; rather, the novel is more reflective of Nella Larsen's *Passing* with the character Clare Kendry acting as the Black counterpart to Gatsby. As Gatsby saw his poor background as the hinderance to his social and economic success, Clare claims the same, stating her "determination to get away, to be a person and not a charity or a problem or even a daughter of the indiscreet Ham" to Irene (Larsen 20). Clare, like Gatsby, refused to allow the confines of her familial situation — or more specifically the situation her race forced her into — to ruin her dreams of escaping into the life she thought she

[19] I specify consciously here because the narrator does "pass" in some instances where the people he interacts with just assume his Whiteness, but he does not purposely place himself in situations that lead to such unconscious passing. Rather, the narrator remains naïve until the novella's conclusion to the consequences that should befall him if his Blackness gets revealed.

deserved. More than that, her decision — unlike that of Johnson's narrator — is carefully planned and executed. When recounting her decision to abandon her past, Clare admits to noticing her ability to pass and the assistance her beauty gave her to do so prior to her meeting of Jack, a White businessman, who later proposes to her; she remarks on how "easy" it would be to never say anything of her past — that if she went away with him, he would be none the wiser (20-21). So, she passes, much like Gatsby passes when Dan Cody pulls his yacht next to him and asked for Gatsby's name and Gatsby replies with a name he had "ready for a long time" (Fitzgerald 78). Thus, if Gatsby indeed passes as Clare does in *Passing*, then *The Great Gatsby* by extension classifies as a passing novel — albeit one told from the outside perspective of the person passing. Such a conclusion not only proves a connection between modernist works and those of the Harlem Renaissance but an *exchange*.

As the Harlem Renaissance and the work produced during the period demonstrates qualities and characteristics valued by Modernism, the reverse also proves itself true. Modernism draws not only from the musical inspiration of jazz, but parallels themes thought exclusive to Black Americans struggling with identity during the twentieth century. Such an exchange between the two movements signifies a fluidity at the borders that constitute the divide between the movements. This blurring results in the double classification of multiple works as both modernist and a part of the Harlem Renaissance. Yet if such obvious parallels exist between Modernism and works within the Harlem Renaissance, the question becomes why scholarship repeatedly treats the two as separate entities rather than a fluid conversation between two groups that are typified by similar goals and practices.

THE HISTORY OF CRITICAL EXCLUSION

Scholarship remains divided in its answer. Houston Baker in *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*[20] theorizes that the disconnect occurs from the critical view of the Harlem Renaissance as a "failure" due to its lack of "*vital, original, effective*, or 'modern' art in the manner […] of British, Anglo-American, and Irish endeavors;" he deepens his argument by claiming that the "judgment" against Harlem Renaissance Modernism "begins with the notions" of White Modernism and that since "Afro-Americans — through conscious and unconscious designs of various Western 'modernisms' — have little in common with Joycean or Eliotic projects" — projects seen as the pinnacle of Modernism — their work fails to apply (xiii - xvi). Yet, a crucial consideration arises when one observes Harlem Renaissance as an independent movement, looking not at its "failures" but at the lasting impact it has had on American literature and culture. Jazz constitutes as a pioneering genre, an essential American art form. The literature produced during the movement later inspired countless authors — both Black and White — and marked a significant change in the concept of the Black American identity. Taking such facts into consideration and then applying the definitions of Modernism to the movement, the premise that works of the Harlem Renaissance somehow "fail" does not make sense.

Brian Carr and Tova Cooper reach a similar conclusion in the article "Zora Neale Hurston and Modernism at the Critical Limit." Building on Baker's theory, they argue critics separate the Harlem Renaissance and Modernism not because of a differentiation in the works but rather a difference in how critics define the Harlem Renaissance. Specifically, they state that "the high modernists' conviction that urbanization" and Black Americans "threatened tradition and community" led to a disbelief in seeing the Harlem Renaissance as "connected to the elite

[20] While published over three decades ago, Houston's work acts as the foundation for current scholarship on the issue of the Harlem Renaissance and Modernism.

[…] American avant-garde" (289). Carr and Tova suggest that the ambiguity over the specifics of what constitutes the Harlem Renaissance leads to its exclusion from Modernism and the "avant-garde." Yet, their argument creates a paradox. If scholars found themselves unable to define the Harlem Renaissance, the simplest solution would be to use contemporary literary movements, like Modernism, as a means of contextualizing the movement. Even with Modernism's state of indefinability "contingent upon the critical perspectives out of which [it] emerges," critics should have looked at the two movements as similar phenomena rather than unrelated entities (290). Thus, one must speculate on what differentiates the two. Race proves itself as the most obvious answer.

Both Bamikunle's "The Harlem Renaissance and White Critical Tradition" and Kemp's "African American Women Poets, the Harlem Renaissance, and Modernism an Apology" pick up on Carr and Tova's difficulty defining the Harlem Renaissance and offer a solution in the form of a racial difference. Bamikunle and Kemp focus on how scholarship examines the Harlem Renaissance from a racial standpoint which results in the irrevocable separation from Modernism. Kemp calls the "literary criticism of the Harlem Renaissance" a "dichotomy between works of a solidly African American culture perspective versus works written from a more mainstream, or culturally exterior perspective;" such a distinction then leads to the exclusion of works within the movements that do not operate within the same perspective (790). In agreement, Bamikunle furthers Kemp's argument by looking at how "it was usually by way of comparison or contrast with some notable American or English writer" that measured "the Black writer's worth," which in turn came from "the foundation […] of critical reception of Black literature by White" critics (85). As a result, Black writers then had to conform to White standards and traditions in order to reach any sort of acclaim — a choice high modernists sneered

at with their notion of “making it new” and breaking conformity. When artists of the Harlem Renaissance did “make it new,” their work became too radical — too uncivilized — for publication, thus leading to the need for independently run Black magazines.

That double standard should not apply to the far-removed contemporary scholars looking at these movements. Critics of the twenty-first century do not share the same prejudicial and exclusionary agenda twentieth century modernist critics shared. Moreover, the distinction of the Harlem Renaissance solely as a Black literary period ignores the parallels White modernist literature contains, such as in works by Fitzgerald and Hemingway. If the Harlem Renaissance categorizes itself as purely Black due to its themes, then *The Great Gatsby*, which draws from jazz *and* passing, might also be characterized as a Harlem Renaissance novel rather than a modernist one. Yet no one classifies it as such; *The Great Gatsby* remains wholly a modernist text. Michael Bibby theorizes that this racialized division persists due to the construction of the literary field as an extension of domineering White cultural values and traditions.

Bibby argues that “the segregation of the New Negro Renaissance from modernist studies is not simply a problem of terminology or canonicity” but rather a consequence of a “structural disciplinary field” built from the “racial formation of Whiteness” (487). Essentially, the problem lies not in a set of racist critics refusing entrance to the Harlem Renaissance into Modernism but in how the values critics use to judge and separate literature base themselves in traditionally White values and customs. Thus, Modernism, a White-ruled movement, remains White because Harlem Renaissance works meet those values in variation. That is not to say that Bibby condemns the field as racist, but rather he calls it a reflection of a time when race meant division no matter the overlap. As a result, Bibby concludes Modernist scholarship excludes the Harlem Renaissance because the scholarship does not see a need for diversity in its White-ruled

movement; historically, it is defined through White works and authors and remains as such. In reference to Bibby's conclusion, McKible theorizes that if literary criticism should merge Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance, it risks "erasing a history of racial exclusion" (431). Yet his theory is ridiculous. Removing the racial barrier between Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance — one that should not exist in the first place due — would not result in an "erasure" but rather a rectification of a double standard. Keeping that standard justifies the racial exclusion. And while it is unreasonable to claim the exclusion of the Harlem Renaissance solely on racism, it does not diminish the undeniable truth that racism plays a part in how that exclusion lasts well into the twenty-first century.

Of the theories and explanations and reasonings as to why the Harlem Renaissance remains outside the purview of Modernism, Bibby comes the closest to a believable and realistic reason for the exclusion. Yes, the Harlem Renaissance suffers from: misidentification; varying levels of success; oppressive labeling of race-based literature. Yet all of those issues stem from a larger problem of applying biased ideals and values from a society set against the movement and the population from which it generates. Of course, the scholarship removes the Harlem Renaissance from Modernism because while modernists rebelled against the traditions and structures of prior literature, the artists of the Harlem Renaissance rebelled against White society and its expectations on *them*. And while these artists did so using experimentation like their modernist contemporaries and even reflected the same themes and concepts, ultimately the goal of the Harlem Renaissance was to embrace a distinction as wholly Black — a Blackness that would never be White. Still, the job of scholars is to be objective, and objectively speaking, the Harlem Renaissance meets the requirements of Modernism in its basic definitions and patterns.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Literature exists in sections, in divisions and sub-divisions. It simply must. But there comes a fine line between dividing literature to capture the essence of a period or genre and excluding works that meet said genre's criteria because the works derive from a group of people history treated as inferior. The division of the Harlem Renaissance and Modernism becomes a separation that crosses that line. For all the determining factors that make Modernism works "modernist," the Harlem Renaissance meets those factors within its own works. The 1920s acts as the central decade for the publication of the "high" works of the movements. Small magazines became necessary for the spreading and publicizing of said works due to mainstream medias' refusal to publish them. Both movements contain strong images of people returning from World War I irrevocably changed and alienated by society. Both demonstrate a mastery over language through advocating experimentation. Both make a lasting impact on literature so far into the future that their works remain relevant and studied a century after their publication. Yet the two movements rarely meet in critical academic conversation, and that is a problem. Literature cannot act as a dividing force between two cultures accomplishing similar goals; it should act rather as the uniting force, at the point of overlap and representation of human identity in peoples otherwise thought to have nothing in common. It *must*, otherwise the field becomes less about the beauty of the craft and more about political agendas designed to exclude. That is not a call for the complete eradication of literary subsections— such a proposal would prove detrimental not only to the field as a whole but it would detract from the discovery and innovation that issues from examining small portions of literature. Contemporary scholarship must yield a better understanding of how the study of essential similarities and differences between literary movements enhance the appreciation of both fields. Most importantly, artificial divisions must be

eliminated. In the case of Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance, the so-called divisions between them are revelatory of nothing more than the archaic practice of discrimination. This must change.

Works Cited

Anderson, Maureen. “The White Reception of Jazz in America.” *African American Review*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2004, p. 135–145. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/1512237. Accessed 18 Mar. 2020.

Baker, Houston A., Jr. *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*. University of Chicago Press, 1987. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat02507a&AN=ohiolink.b10595519&site=eds-live.

Bamikunle, Aderemi. “The Harlem Renaissance and White Critical Tradition.” *CLA Journal*, vol. 57, no. 2, 2013, p. 81–94. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/44325853. Accessed 20 Mar. 2020.

Bibby, Michael. “The Disinterested and Fine: New Negro Renaissance Poetry and the Racial Formation of Modernist Studies.” *Modernism/Modernity*, vol. 20, no. 3, Sept. 2013, p. 485–501. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1353/mod.2013.0091.

Carr, Brian, and Tova Cooper. “Zora Neale Hurston and Modernism at the Critical Limit.” *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 48, no. 2, Summer 2002, p. 285–313. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=hma&AN=509311151&site=eds-live.

Childs, Peter. *Modernism*. Routledge, 2017.

Chinitz, David and Gail McDonald. “Introduction.” *A Companion to Modernist Poetry*, edited by David Chinitz and Gail McDonald, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2014, p. 1-3.

Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*.” *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature Volume 1*, edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Valeria A. Smith, W.W. Norton & Company, 2014, p. 688-760.

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. Oxford University Press, 2008.

Goldsmith, Meredith. "White Skin, White Mask: Passing, Posing, and Performing in *The Great Gatsby*." *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 49, no. 3, 2003, p. 443–468. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/26286297.

Hughes, Langston. "I, Too." *Poetry Foundation*. 2003. Web. 15 March 2020.

---. "Dance Africaine." *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature Volume 1*, edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Valeria A. Smith, W.W. Norton & Company, 2014, p. 1305.

---. "Jazzonia." *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature Volume 1*, edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Valeria A. Smith, W.W. Norton & Company, 2014, p. 1306.

---. "The Weary Blues." *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature Volume 1*, edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Valeria A. Smith, W.W. Norton & Company, 2014, p. 1307-1308.

Hurston, Zora Neale. "Characteristics of Negro Expression." *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature Volume 1*, edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Valeria A. Smith, W.W. Norton & Company, 2014, p. 1050-1062

Johnson, James Weldon. *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. New York: Penguin Book, 1990.

Kemp, Melissa Prunty. "African American Women Poets, the Harlem Renaissance, and Modernism: An Apology." *Callaloo: A Journal of African Diaspora Arts and Letters*, vol. 36, no. 3, 2013, p. 789–801. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1353/cal.2013.0172.

Kuenz, Jane. “Modernism, Mass Culture, and the Harlem Renaissance: The Case of Countee Cullen.” *Modernism/Modernity*, vol. 14, no. 3, Sept. 2007, p. 507–515. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1353/mod.2007.0064.

Larsen, Nella. *Passing*. Chemeketa Press, 2018.

Locke, Alain. “The New Negro.” *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature Volume 1*, edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Valeria A. Smith, W.W. Norton & Company, 2014, p. 973-981.

McKay, Claude. “Outcast.” *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature Volume 1*, edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Valeria A. Smith, W.W. Norton & Company, 2014, p. 1007.

---. “The White House.” *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature Volume 1*, edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Valeria A. Smith, W.W. Norton & Company, 2014, p. 1006-1007.

McKible, Adam, and Suzanne W. Churchill. “In Conversation: The Harlem Renaissance and the New Modernist Studies.” *Modernism/Modernity*, vol. 20, no. 3, Sept. 2013, p. 427–431. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1353/mod.2013.0071.

Morrison, Nick. “Stride Piano: Bottom-End Jazz.” *NPR*, NPR, 12 Apr. 2010, www.npr.org/2010/04/12/125689840/stride-piano-bottom-end-jazz.

Pound, Ezra. “‘A Retrospect’ and ‘A Few Don’ts’.” *Poetry Foundation*. 2009. Web. 15 March 2020.

Roshnavand, Farshid Nowrouzi, and Rajabali Askarzadeh Torghabeh. “African Americans and Reconceptualization of Identity: Black Participation in World War I and the Rise of the New Negro Consciousness.” *Khazar Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences*, vol. 16,

no. 1, Mar. 2013, p. 37. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edb&AN=86876264&site=eds-live.

Thaggart, Miriam. *Images of Black Modernism: Verbal and Visual Strategies of the Harlem Renaissance*. University of Massachusetts Press, 2010.

Toomer, Jean. *Cane*. Liveright Publishing Company, 1975.

Trott, Sarah. “A ‘Lost Crowd’: Reconfiguring the Harlem Renaissance as a Post-War ‘Lost Generation.’” *Comparative American Studies*, vol. 11, no. 4, Dec. 2013, p. 434–447. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1179/1477570013Z.00000000057.

Wall, Cheryl. *The Harlem Renaissance: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2016.

Whitworth, Michael. “Rhythm, Form, and Diction in Modernist Poetry.” *A Companion to Modernist Poetry*, edited by David Chinitz and Gail McDonald, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2014, p. 4-19.