Harlem Renaissance Study Guide

Harlem Renaissance

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

The Harlem Renaissance was a period between World War I and the Great Depression when black artists and writers flourished in the United States. Critics and historians have assigned varying dates to the movement's beginning and end, but most tend to agree that by 1917 there were signs of increased cultural activity among black artists in the Harlem section of New York City and that by the mid-1930s the movement had lost much of its original vigor. While Harlem was the definite epicenter of black culture during this period, and home to more blacks than any other urban area in the nation in the years after World War I, other cities, such as Chicago, Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia, also fostered similar but smaller communities of black artists.

The movement came about for a number of reasons. Between 1890 and 1920, the near collapse of the southern agricultural economy, coupled with a labor shortage in the north, prompted about two million blacks to migrate to northern cities in search of work. In addition, World War I had left an entire generation of African Americans asking why, when they had fought and many had died for their country, they were still afforded second-class status. By the end of the war, many northern American cities, such as Harlem, had large numbers of African Americans emboldened by new experiences and better paychecks, energized by the possibility of change. A number of black intellectuals, such as W. E. B. Du Bois and Alain Locke, were making it clear that the time had come for white America to take notice of the achievements of African-American artists and thinkers. The idea that whites might come to accept blacks if they were exposed to their artistic endeavors became a popular one.

To this end, magazines such as the *Crisis*, published by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and *Opportunity* featured the prose and poetry of Harlem Renaissance stars Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, Nella Larsen, and Zora Neale Hurston. Major New York-based publishing houses began to search for new black voices and print their poems, short stories, and novels. White intellectual society embraced these writers and supported— financially and through social contacts—their efforts to educate Americans about their race, culture, and heritage through their art. Ultimately, however, the financial backing began to run dry in the early 1930s with the collapse of the New York stock market and the ensuing worldwide economic depression. The Renaissance had run its course.

Themes

Race and Passing

The issue of skin color is of critical importance in most of the novels, stories, and poetry of the Harlem Renaissance. For example, a quick examination of the titles included in Cullen's first collection of poetry, *Color*, indicates that he is very conscious of his race and its defining connotations in America: "To a Brown Girl" and "Black Magdalens" are two of the titles in the collection. In another one of the collection's poems, "The Shroud of Color," Cullen writes of his race and of the experience of being a second-class citizen because of his skin color:

Lord, being dark, forwilled to that despair
My color shrouds me in, I am as dirt
Beneath my brother's heel.

In addition, many of the period's authors refer to a phenomenon known as "passing"a lightskinned black person living as a white person. In Larsen's *Passing*, the heroine faces tragedy when her white husband becomes aware of her African- American background. In another of Larsen's books, *Quicksand*, the mixed-race heroine struggles to find a place in society where she can feel comfortable and welcome. She feels restricted when she attempts to settle in black society but experiences dissatisfaction and discontent while passing as a white woman.

African Heritage

Many of the period's authors highlighted their African heritage. Some viewed Africa in a romantic light and as an ancient place of origin and therefore a prime source of artistic insight. For example, Hughes, in his poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," refers to the thousands of years of African experience inside him when he writes:

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to
sleep

One of Cullen's best-known poems, "Heritage," celebrates the rich cultural legacy being discovered by many of the Renaissance artists. In the poem, he ponders the meaning of Africa to himself and to other American blacks.

In his anthology, *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, Locke encourages young black artists and writers to look for inspiration in their own African heritageas separate from the dominant white American-European heritage. The book closes with an essay by Du Bois suggesting that American blacks reach out to blacks in Africa and around the world, initiating a Pan-African movement. In fact, *The New Negro* and other books published during the Renaissance were decorated with African-inspired motifs and designs.

Conflicting Images of Blacks

One of the most difficult issues writers dealt with during the Renaissance was how to portray African-American life. On one hand, many writers and intellectuals had a keen desire to illustrate black society only in the most positive fashion, writing stories filled with middle-class, educated characters working to become successful in a whitedominated America. Others believed that white perceptions of black society should not matter and that all sides of the African-American experience should be exposed and celebrated in the literature. Adding to this dichotomy was the concern that the more sensationalist or primitive images of blacks in literature were the ones that sold□especially to white readers.

Many black intellectuals condemned, for example, the first and only issue of the literary magazine *Fire!!*, published by Walter Thurman. The issue contained stories and poetry by some of Harlem's most famous young writers, but much of what they were writing about did not fit the positive image of the race that black thinkers such as Du Bois and Benjamin Brawley considered appropriate. In fact, after reading the issue, which included pieces about prostitution, homosexuality, hatred of whites, and conflicts between lower-class black men and women, Brawley allegedly burned his copy. Hughes responded to the idea that black writers should be circumspect in what they produce in his 1926 article "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," proclaiming, "If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. . . . If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter, either."

One writer who was often condemned by members of the black intelligentsia for portraying blacks in a negative fashion was McKay. His novel *Home to Harlem* upset many who believed that his story, set amid the nightclubs and speakeasies of Harlem, catered to the image many whites had of blacks as primitive savages who, even when dressed in fine clothes, were ready to succumb to their baser urges at a moment's notice. Some black critics also charged Hurston with writing stories that were unnecessarily bawdy and crude, but she argued that her work accurately reflected the folktales she collected in black rural areas.

Style

Dialect and Colloquialisms

There was no consensus on the use of black or rural dialect in the work of Harlem Renaissance writers; some authors used it liberally while others shunned it entirely. Hurston used dialect in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* to reflect the atmosphere and tone of the language she heard when collecting folktales. For this, Richard Wright later condemned the novel and claimed that she was painting a negative and stereotypical image of blacks for white readers.

Johnson used dialect verse and misspellings in some of his poetry but decided to discard these techniques when writing his collection of rural sermons turned into verse, *God's Trombones*, considered to be, far and away, his best work. He is reported to have said that dialect restricted what he wanted to do in *God's Trombones*. The sermons maintain the rhythm and pacing of speech he admired in black preachers but are delivered in a more sophisticated manner. For example, the poem-sermon entitled "The Creation" is written in standard English but maintains the cadence of powerful oratory:

Then God himself stepped down□
And the sun was on his right hand,
And the moon was on his left;
The stars were clustered about his head,
And the earth was under his feet . . . .

Music

Many of the Renaissance poets experimented with using the cadences of popular music in their work, but none was as well known for this technique as Hughes. He used blues and jazz beats in much of his poetry, recreating the sounds and music he heard in the clubs and on the streets of Harlem. Hughes's poetry not only incorporates the rhythms of familiar music but also covers topics common to many blues songs: economic hardship, failed romance, loneliness, and sexual desire. In the poem "The Weary Blues," Hughes writes of a piano player performing at a club and uses the technique of repetition, a familiar technique in many blues songs.

Urban and Rural Settings

Because many of the Harlem Renaissance writers moved to the cities from rural areas, both settings became critical components of their work. For example, Toomer's book of poetry, stories, and a play, *Cane*, includes a section devoted entirely to characters in a rural Georgian setting, with images of trees and sugar cane. In the second section, the action takes place in Washington, D.C., and is filled with images of streets, nightclubs, houses, and theaters. Hurston set most of her stories in rural towns, in accordance with her lifelong effort to collect black rural folktales.

The move between rural and urban is also critical to many Renaissance novels. In McKay's *Home to Harlem*, the primary locale of the story is Harlem. But each of the novel's protagonists comes from someplace else: Jake is assumed to be originally from the rural South, and Ray is Haitian. Larsen's novel *Quicksand* follows a mixed race woman who travels from her job at a black southern college to various large cities around the world in search of a place she can truly call home. She ultimately ends up living in rural Alabama, feeling suffocated.

Historical Context

The Great Migration

The Great Migration involved huge numbers of African Americans moving from the rural southern United States to northern industrial cities during the first few decades of the twentieth century in search of better jobs. This shift in population helped foster the cultural richness that became known as the Harlem Renaissance.

For most of the nineteenth century, the southern United States, like most of the rest of the country, was primarily an agricultural society. By the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the northern economy began to shift to a more industrial base. The southern economy became stagnated and provided a strong impetus for black (and white) farm workers to consider moving north, where the jobs were. Southern blacks considered a move to the north as a step toward economic independence and a better life in a region of the country where they believed they might be treated more fairly.

In addition to the worsening southern economy, blacks were attracted to the north by the fact that during World War I, the United States began limiting the number of immigrants allowed in the country. This created a labor shortage in the north just at a time when the factories were expected to increase production to fulfill orders in support of the war effort. Companies that had rejected the idea of hiring blacks were forced to recruit them actively, even sending labor agents into the South to find workers and offer training in areas such as shipbuilding. Soon, family members were returning to their southern homes from New York, Detroit, Chicago, and other urban centers, telling stories of better jobs and higher salaries. Between 1916 and 1919, about half a million blacks moved to the north; roughly one million blacks made the trip in the 1920s. Between 1910 and 1920, New York City's African-American population jumped 50 percent.

The New Negro

"New Negro" was the term white Americans had used to refer to a newly enslaved African. However, during the first few decades of the twentieth century, the phrase denoted an African American who was politically astute, well educated, and proud of his cultural heritage□the very opposite of a docile slave. Booker T. Washington's view of a New Negro was outlined in his 1900 book, *A New Negro for a New Century* and encompassed education, self-improvement, and self-respect.

During the Harlem Renaissance, Locke used the term in the title of his anthology of African- American poetry and prose, *The New Negro: An Interpretation*. Locke believed that African-American writers and artists should participate in the leadership of their people and should be involved in showing white America a new vision of blacks as productive and creative forces to be reckoned with. The New Negro, in Locke's estimation, should be an African American who asserted himself or herself economically, politically, and culturally. In his role as the disseminator of the New Negro philosophy, Locke organized a series of traveling African- American art exhibits and helped launch a national black theater movement.

Red Summer of 1919

In the years immediately following World War I, relations between blacks and whites were strained. White war veterans returning to northern cities felt threatened by the increased population of blacks and their stronger economic position□at least when compared to the prewar years. Many blacks returned from the war wondering why, after fighting for their country and receiving commendations for their bravery from the French, they were still treated as second-class citizens at home. Southerners sensed a heightened level of self-confidence among the blacks visiting their families from their jobs in northern cities. Economic pressures hit the general American population after the war when the government lifted price controls and unemployment and inflation rates jumped.

During the summer and early fall of 1919, twenty-five race riots erupted across the nation in Chicago; Charleston, South Carolina; Omaha, Nebraska; Washington, D.C., and other cities. In the space of six weeks, seventy-six lynchings were reported; a dozen of the lynchings were perpetrated on black men still wearing their service uniforms.

Johnson coined the term "Red Summer" while investigating these incidents for the National As- sociation for the Advancement of Colored People. Racial tensions were exacerbated by the nation's postwar fear of the newly formed Bolshevik, or "red," regime in Russia. Many efforts by blacks to improve their economic and political status were met with white suspicions that they were as "radical" as the Russian Bolsheviks.

Life in Harlem during the 1920s and 1930s

Harlem, a neighborhood in New York City, became the preeminent black urban enclave in the United States early in the twentieth century, when thousands of blacks migrated primarily from southern and rural regions. Previously, the area had been a wealthy white neighborhood, but economic hard times and skyrocketing real estate values at the start of the twentieth century created a situation in which clever entrepreneurs began leasing vacant rooms in white-owned buildings to black newcomers to the city. Harlem's black population in 1914 was about fifty thousand; by 1930 it had grown to two hundred thousand.

The neighborhood also attracted black intellectuals, artists, and others interested in participating in Harlem's increasingly vibrant cultural environment. Black political organizations, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the National Urban League, established offices in Harlem, as did major black newspapers such as *The Messenger* and *The New York Age*. Marcus Garvey, leader of the "back-to- Africa " movement, set up his Universal Negro Improvement Association in Harlem. Garvey and others energized Harlemites with their messages of black pride and self-sufficiency.

Harlem also became an entertainment capital early in the century. Musical performers moved to Harlem, drawn by the atmosphere and the hundreds of nightclubs and other venues where the jazz sound was wildly popular. Performers Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Fats Waller, and others played to appreciative crowds at nightspots like Smalls's Inn and the Savoy Ballroom. But not only locals patronized the free-spirited nightclubs that began to give Harlem a wild reputation; whites from other parts of New York City "discovered" Harlem and made it the place to be on a Saturday night. Ironically, some of the nightclubs were off-limits to blacks, including the famous Cotton Club, until 1928 catering to a wealthy white clientele intent on experiencing the "exotic" Harlem atmosphere.

Movement Variations

Visual Arts during the Harlem Renaissance

Visual arts made a strong statement during the Harlem Renaissance, creating images based on newly developed consciousness about heritage and culture. For example, in her article on Harlem Renaissance art and artists in *Print*, Michele Y. Washington notes that black artists' interest in Egypt as part of Africa and their heritage contributed to many of the motifs in the Art Deco style becoming widespread during the 1920s and 1930s.

Aaron Douglas, one of the period's leading artists, used images of African masks and sculpture in his geometric, Art Deco-style drawings. He served as an apprentice to Winold Reiss, the German artist whose geometric and angular drawings were featured on the original cover of Alain Locke's *The New Negro*. Douglas became the premier illustrator for the period's magazines and books and also created large murals on the walls of various Harlem nightclubs.

Many of the leading Renaissance artists had formal art training but used vibrant and energetic African images to break away from the more traditional forms of European art. Like Douglas, many of these artists collaborated with black writers to decorate the covers and insides of their published poetry collections, novels, and magazines.

The Renaissance in Other American Cities

While the energy of the explosion of African- American literature, music, art, and politics was focused primarily in Harlem, other cities also experienced their own versions of the Harlem Renaissance during the 1920s and 1930s. Artists and writers located in cities such as Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit, and Washington, D.C., were producing valuable and exciting work.

Locke, for example, maintained his contact with Howard University in Washington, D.C., as the chair of its philosophy department for more than forty years. A number of writers got their start in the nation's capital, including Toomer and Rudolph Fisher, and Hughes often spent time there. Chicago was not only a hotbed of musical energy during the 1920s and 1930s, but writers such as Frank Marshall Davis wrote while living there. And, though he wrote just after the period of the Renaissance, Richard Wright used his own Chicago experiences liberally in his work.

Music during the Harlem Renaissance

Music saturated Harlem during the 1920s and 1930s, whether at the numerous Protestant churches, where age-old and new spirituals comforted the congregations, or at the neighborhood's hundreds of speakeasies, nightclubs, and theaters, where jazz and blues tunes pushed dancers well into the early morning hours.

Of all the styles of music in Harlem, the district is probably best known for its jazz. Black bandleaders such as Louis Armstrong, Fletcher Henderson, and Duke Ellington made jazz the neighborhood's (and the nation's) most popular musical style in the 1920s and 1930s, even though many people—including numerous black intellectuals— found its rhythms too harsh and bawdy. But the rage for jazz would not die, and patrons crowded Harlem's countless clubs nearly every night to hear the dynamism and spontaneity that were the hallmarks of jazz.

In 1926, the Savoy Ballroom opened, and its reasonable cover charges encouraged people of all races and economic levels to spend the evening dancing and listening to the best jazz in the world. While many well-known musicians performed there, the Savoy was also a place where unknowns could see if they had the talent to compete. Jazz and blues singers Bessie Smith and Ella Fitzgerald got their starts at the Savoy.

Representative Authors

Countee Cullen (1903-1946)

Born May 30, 1903, in Louisville, Kentucky (although a few accounts claim Baltimore or New York City), Countee Cullen is believed to have been reared by his paternal grandmother, who died when he was fifteen. He was then adopted by the Reverend Frederick Cullen, later the head of the Harlem chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and introduced to the lively intellectual and cultural life of New York. He received an undergraduate degree from New York University and a master's degree from Harvard University.

Cullen, a writer of both poetry and prose, believed that art should be where whites and blacks find common ground. In 1925, his most wellknown work, *Color*, was published to nearly universal praise. In the 1930s, he turned to teaching and eventually began producing his plays. Cullen received numerous awards for his work, including a Guggenheim fellowship in 1928. He died of uremic poisoning January 9, 1946, in New York City.

W. E. B. Du Bois (1868-1963)

William Edgar Burghardt Du Bois, or, as he is more commonly known, W. E. B. Du Bois, was born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, February 23, 1868. Trained as a sociologist, Du Bois received his bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees from Harvard University. He condemned racism in America and was one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). He wrote numerous books on race issues and worked as a university professor.

In addition to his support of young writers during the Harlem Renaissance, Du Bois's 1903 sociological examination of African Americans, *The Souls of Black Folk*, helped create the atmosphere in which many of the Renaissance writers and artists could flourish. He coined the phrase "talented tenth" to denote the group of highly educated, culturally adept, and politically astute blacks who would lead the rest of the race into better lives. By the early 1930s, Du Bois became disillusioned about life in America, and his political beliefs forced him to resign from his NAACP position. His politics led to membership in the Socialist Party, and he experienced confrontations with the U.S. government on several occasions. After joining the Communist Party in 1960, Du Bois moved to Ghana, where he died on August 27, 1963.

Jessie Redmon Fauset (1882-1961)

Jessie Redmon Fauset was born in Snow Hill, New Jersey, April 27, 1884, the daughter of a minister. She was the first black woman to graduate from Cornell University, received a master's degree from the University of Pennsylvania, and studied at the

Sorbonne in Paris. In addition to writing novels, poetry, short stories, and essays, Fauset taught French in the Washington, D.C., schools and worked as the literary editor for the *Crisis*. It was in this last capacity that she encouraged many of the more wellknown writers of the Harlem Renaissance.

While her reputation as an editor of other writers' works has tended to outshine her reputation as a fiction writer, many critics consider the novel *Plum Bun* Fauset's strongest work. In it, she tells the story of a young black girl who could pass for white but ultimately claims her racial identity and pride. She wrote three other novels, with mixed reviews, but most readers of that period's writings believe that Fauset's strengths lay in nonfiction. Fauset died of heart disease April 30, 1961, in Philadelphia.

Langston Hughes (1902-1967)

James Langston Hughes, or just Langston Hughes as he was commonly known, was a writer of poetry, short stories, novels, plays, song lyrics, and essays. His frank portrayals of the black community around him often provoked sharp comments from African-American literary critics. Hughes's retort, that he was simply depicting life as he saw it, did not impress the critics who believed that he should present black life in the best possible light to help improve the plight of African Americans.

Hughes was born in Joplin, Missouri, on February 1, 1902 to a father who was a rancher, a businessman, and a lawyer, and a mother who worked as a teacher. Hughes's background was varied and colorful: by the time his first poetry book, *The Weary Blues*, came out in 1926, he had spent time as a cook, waiter, truck farmer, college student, nightclub doorman in Paris, and sailor, and he had lived in numerous American cities and foreign countries. He died on May 22, 1967, in New York City of congestive heart failure.

Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960)

Zora Neale Hurston was the daughter of a preacher and a seamstress and was born January 7, 1891, in Eatonville, Florida. Hurston quit school at age thirteen to care for her brother's children but later attended a Baltimore high school, thanks to a generous patron. Her undergraduate and graduate studies in anthropology at Barnard College and Columbia University influenced her novels, plays, and two published collections of African-American folklore.

Hurston fought against a common impression that the poverty often associated with black American culture made it less valuable. She continually encouraged blacks, especially those of the educated middle class, to recognize their rural cultural heritage. Many criticized her writing as bawdy and her most famous work, the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, as simplistic and reactionary. Other readers, ultimately the majority, praised the book as offering positive self-affirmation for African Americans.

Hurston also worked as a maid, a staff writer for Paramount Studios, a librarian at the Library of Congress, and a theater professor, and she received Guggenheim fellowships in 1936 and 1939. On January 28, 1960, she died in Fort Pierce, Florida.

James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938)

While James Weldon Johnson did produce literature during the Harlem Renaissance period, he is noted for his civic leadership and support of young black writers. Born on June 17, 1871, in Jacksonville, Florida, Weldon became at various times a poet, novelist, editor, lawyer, journalist, educator, civil rights leader, songwriter, translator, and diplomat. He received undergraduate and graduate degrees from Atlanta University and did graduate work in creative literature at Columbia University.

Johnson's work as a newspaper owner attracted the attention of such black luminaries as W. E. B. Du Bois. Johnson's only novel, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*, is remembered for its realism, and his groundbreaking study of black music, *The Book of American Negro Spirituals*, educated many Americans about the fact that black music encompassed more than minstrel shows and paved the way for his depiction of black sermons as poetry in *God's Trombones*. During the 1920s, Weldon served as the head of the NAACP and edited a critically acclaimed collection of verse entitled *The Book of American Negro Poetry*. He died following a car accident in Wiscasset, Maine, on June 26, 1938.

Nella Larsen (1891-1964)

Nella Larsen was born in Chicago, Illinois on April 13, 1891; her father was black West Indian and her mother was Danish. This mixed heritage became the foundation for her novels *Quicksand* and *Passing*, in which the heroines struggle with the challenges of being neither black nor white. Many critics have said that *Quicksand*, winner of a Harmon Foundation Prize in 1928, was one of the period's strongest novels. Her education included time at Fisk University in Nashville, the University of Copenhagen, as well as librarian and nursing schools in New York. In 1930, Larsen was the first African-American woman to receive a Guggenheim fellowship.

A series of incidents, including a mistaken charge of plagiarism and her divorce from physicist husband Elmer S. Imes, caused Larsen to leave literary society and spend the final twenty years of her life working as nurse in Manhattan hospitals. She died March 30, 1964, in New York City of heart failure.

Alain Locke (1886-1954)

Alain Le Roy Locke, born September 13, 1886, in Philadelphia, was the son of two schoolteachers. He received a doctorate from Harvard in 1918, after studying philosophy at Oxford University, where he was a Rhodes Scholar. He also studied at universities in Paris and Berlin. Some critics credit Locke with bringing about the Harlem

Renaissance in earnest with the 1926 publication of *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, his compilation of the best early-twentieth-century African- American literature.

Locke believed that the best chance for blacks to become accepted in America lay in exposing white communities to the work of black writers and artists. He also encouraged black artists to look to their history and culture for inspiration. In addition to serving as the chair of the Howard University philosophy department for more than forty years, Locke published and edited other books on African-American music, history, and poetry. He died in New York City on June 9, 1954, after a long illness.

Claude McKay (1889-1948)

Claude McKay (born Festus Claudius McKay) was born September 15, 1889, to a farming couple in the British West Indies□what is now Jamaica. McKay reveled in reading British poetry and learning about European philosophy while in school. After he began to write his own poetry, however, one of his teachers encouraged him to stop imitating the English style and develop his own voice□a suggestion he embraced.

In 1912, he left Jamaica to enroll at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, thanks to a monetary award for his book of poetry, *Songs of Jamaica*. He made his way to New York City by working as a laborer. McKay's poetry became more militant as he experienced racism and began publishing in the *Liberator*, a magazine run by a wellknown American communist, Max Eastman. In 1928, after traveling around the world for a number of years, including trips to the Soviet Union, McKay published his provocative and controversial first novel, *Home to Harlem*. During the 1920s, McKay also participated in Communist Party activities in the United States. He died of heart failure in Chicago on May 22, 1948.

Jean Toomer (1894-1967)

Born in Washington, D.C., on December 26, 1894 into a racially mixed family, Jean Toomer spent his early years living in primarily white, wellto- do neighborhoods. When he was a teenager, the family suffered a financial setback and began living as an average black family, sending Jean to an all-black high school. He attended a number of universities but decided on being a writer during his year at the City College of New York. For one year, between 1921 and 1922, Toomer worked as the principal of a rural black school in Georgia, an experience that gave him a chance to investigate his black roots.

Toomer wrote some of the most experimental and progressive literature of the early twentieth century. His first novel, *Cane*, published in 1923, is a fiction piece, combining both poetry and prose, and is considered a masterpiece of *avant-garde* writing (writing that is considered at the forefront for the period or somewhat experimental). He also published plays, and numerous journals printed his essays and short stories. Toomer died in Doylestown, Pennsylvania on March 30, 1967.

Representative Works

Cane

Jean Toomer's *Cane* is a three-part novel comprising both poems and short stories. Published in 1923, the work was hailed as a revolutionary exploration of black city and rural life in early twentieth century America.

Toomer's experimentation with style, structure, and language reflects the influence of the numerous *avant-garde* writers and artists (those whose work is considered groundbreaking or somewhat experimental) he met while living in the Greenwich Village section of New York City. The book received much praise from the critics for its efforts to break from typical realism and for its exciting use of language but garnered little popular success. While Toomer went on to write essays and plays, *Cane* was his only published book.

Color

In 1925, Countee Cullen published his first collection of poems, *Color*, to high praise. Cullen's work, including the poetry in *Color*, was known for its beauty and lyricism, despite featuring incidents of racism. Alain Locke referred to Cullen as "a genius" in his review in *Opportunity*, published not long after the release of Cullen's collection, comparing Cullen with the poets A. E. Houseman and Edna St. Vincent Millay.

Both black and white readers eagerly awaited Cullen's first book; in fact, his poetry, especially that found in his first collection, was so popular that many blacks of the day knew Cullen's verses by heart. The best-known poem from this collection is "Heritage," in which Cullen considers the meaning of Africa to himself and African Americans. The collection won a Harmon Foundation award in 1925.

God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse

James Weldon Johnson's *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse* was published in 1927. This collection of poetry established Johnson as one of the literary stars of the period and reflected the style and rhythm of the preaching that the author heard in African-American churches. Countee Cullen, reviewing the collection in *The Bookman*, called Johnson's work "magnificent." Many critics have noted that Johnson does not use dialect in this poetry collection, and generally the response to the poet's decision is favorable.

Home to Harlem

Claude McKay's novel *Home to Harlem* was published in 1928, the first in a series of three novels that many critics see as a trilogy of black life in America. The story centers on the relationship between two black men, Jake and Ray. Jake is an AWOL soldier, intent on returning to Harlem and the good times he remembers there. Ray is his opposite— a highly educated man who has completely lost touch with his culture. Through their conversations and actions, McKay shows two ways of responding to the racial prejudice in America during the 1920s. Ray experiences intellectual angst and leaves the United States for Europe, while Jake remains in Harlem, happy with his life and friends but intent on maintaining his pride.

Home to Harlem was the first bestselling book by a black writer in the United States. The novel was such a commercial success that it was reprinted five times in two months. Many readers were attracted by the book's racy image of jazzage Harlem; McKay writes of prostitutes, nightclubs, and boozy parties. However, many critics —especially those black critics who believed that positive representations of African Americans would help rid the nation of its racial problems— condemned McKay's novel for its bawdy images of black life in Harlem.

The New Negro: An Interpretation

Many historians and critics of the Harlem Renaissance credit the 1925 publication of Alain Locke's anthology, *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, with encouraging the explosion of energy among black artists and writers in the 1920s and 1930s. The collection includes poetry and prose from such Renaissance stars as Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Zora Neale Hurston, and Claude McKay. The high quality of the anthology's work attracted the attention of literary critics of the day and alerted the public to the talents of a previously unknown group of writers. The book also served to alert black writers that they were not alone by exposing them to other writers' efforts and by promoting an atmosphere of inspiration.

The anthology received excellent reviews, including positive comments from W. E. B. Du Bois. Locke felt strongly that a group of African-American artists and writers could bridge the gap between white and black communities, and the publication of the *The New Negro* was an effort to start that process.

Quicksand

Nella Larsen wrote two novels addressing the issue of light-skinned blacks living as whites, *Quicksand* and *Passing*, but *Quicksand*, published in 1928, was the first and more well received. In *Quicksand*, Larsen tells the story of a woman of mixed ancestry, much like herself, who feels comfortable in neither black nor white society.

Critics were impressed with the rich psychological background Larsen gave her characters in the novel, as well as with the novel's use of symbolism. In addition, many readers were happy that a black writer, while still tackling sensitive issues of race and culture, had chosen to place most of the story in a relatively genteel setting, as opposed to many other novels that depicted impoverished black society. With the publication of *Quicksand*, many intellectuals involved in the Harlem Renaissance took positive notice of Larsen, including W. E. B. Du Bois and Alain Locke, and predicted her continued success as an author. The novel won the Harmon Foundation's bronze medal in 1928.

Their Eyes Were Watching God

Critics consider *Their Eyes Were Watching God* Zora Neale Hurston's best fictional work. The 1937 novel (late in the period but still considered a Harlem Renaissance work) is informed by the extensive work Hurston did collecting black folktales throughout the 1920s and 1930s. It tells the story of a black woman struggling to assert her identity□ both as an African American and as a woman□in the southern United States around 1900.

The critical reception of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was mixed; some readers praised its accurate portrayal of small-town black life, while others, such as Richard Wright, accused Hurston of pursuing racial stereotyping to please white audiences. Overall, the novel was under-appreciated when it was first published and viewed as an escapist piece of fiction. It gained considerable respect in the last half of the twentieth century as a feminist tale of empowerment and fulfillment.

The Weary Blues

The Weary Blues, Langston Hughes's first published collection of poetry, released in 1926, contains both traditional lyric poems written on classical subjects and poems about being black in America in the early twentieth century. Some of the strongest verses, in fact, reflect Hughes's love for blues and jazz music by imitating the cadences of popular tunes heard in Harlem nightclubs and on the streets.

Though a few of the poems in this collection were written when Hughes was a teenager, most critics still saw in the volume a special energy and vigor; indeed, many of these poems remain the author's most well known and well loved pieces, such as "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." Many black critics, however, were uncomfortable with his less traditional rhyming schemes and, concerned that Hughes was furthering the negative image of African Americans, disliked his portrayals of unsophisticated blacks and their day-to-day lives. They referred to him as a "racial artist," or an artist who relies too heavily on his identity as an African American. Other critics praised his successful integration of musical styles into his poetry and language, especially in the title piece, "The Weary Blues," which captures the tone of a piano player performing in a nightclub. Hughes's experimental style was both respected and condemned by various readers and critics.

Critical Overview

The criticism on the Harlem Renaissance movement tends to focus on its impact on black literature and on the African-American community. In fact, many critics, while acknowledging that the current energy in black literature and music does have its foundations at least partly in the Harlem Renaissance, hold that the movement came up short in terms of staying power. Andrea Stuart, writing in *New Statesman*, questions whether the Harlem Renaissance has had any lasting impact on the lives of ordinary black Americans. "The legacy of the Harlem Renaissance remains a profoundly romantic one for the black bourgeoisie," Stuart comments. But, "on the streets, where the great majority of black culture is made, its echoes are only faintly heard," she claims.

Amritjit Singh notes in his book *The Novels of the Harlem Renaissance: Twelve Black Writers* that the artists involved in the Harlem Renaissance failed to develop a "black American school of literature" for a variety of reasons. The most critical reason, he argues, is that the artists themselves "reflect the spirit of the times in their refusal to join causes or movements" and were interested less in the societal problems of blacks than in their own individual problems. Margaret Perry, in her book *The Harlem Renaissance: An Annotated Bibliography and Commentary*, generally agrees with this concept, noting that the writers of this period "failed to use their blackness to fullness and with total honesty in order to create that unique genre of American literature one called black or Afro- American."

While acknowledging the shortcomings of the Harlem Renaissance as noted by numerous current critics as well as by the era's participants, George E. Kent believes that the movement has still provided American literature with some very "fundamental" accomplishments. He argues in *Black World* that "the short story in the hands of [Jean] Toomer, Eric Waldron, and Langston Hughes became a much more flexible form," and that, while no Harlem Renaissance author created a truly new form of the novel, these writers did provide stories that "occasionally stopped just short of greatness." Kent also praises the playwrighting of the period, though it received little Broadway exposure.

Other readers of the period's literature have noted its influences. Kenneth R. Janken addresses the deep affection black intelligentsia had for French culture during the early part of the twentieth century and how this both contributed to the movement and prevented them from seeing the limitations of the French social model. He comments in *The Historian* that, while the Harlem Renaissance certainly was indebted to French intellectuals for much of its philosophy about racial equality and recognition of an African diaspora, it viewed the position of blacks in French society through rose-colored glasses. Harlem Renaissance writers "could not thoroughly critique the French colonial system . . . that continued to exploit the majority of Africans," Janken notes.

Many critics have depicted the Harlem Renaissance as a period of great hope and optimism, but Daylanne K. English disagrees. In *Critical Inquiry*, he argues that, upon closer examination, the opposite is true. "The Renaissance writers were, in fact, preoccupied by the possibility and the picturing of various modern, and only sometimes racially specific, wastelands," notes the author.

Nathan Huggins, in his well-respected 1971 book *Harlem Renaissance*, questions the exclusiveness of the movement to the nation's black population and posits that black and white Americans "have been so long and so intimately a part of one another's experience that, will it or not, they cannot be understood independently." He argues that the creation of Harlem "as a place of exotic culture" was as essential to whites as it was to blacks. Locke's declaration of the New Negro reflected America's continuing fascination with remaking oneself and was, in truth, "a public relations promotion," Huggins asserts. African Americans had to be presented in a better light, in a way the majority of whites could accept and blacks themselves could internalize. "Even the best of the poems of the Harlem Renaissance carried the burden of selfconsciousness of oppression and black limitation," he notes.

Aderemi Bamikunle also examines how whites affected the work of Harlem Renaissance writers. He asserts that the white connection with black writing has a long history, going back to the mid- 1800s, when white abolitionists found and published black authors who would write "according to a particular genre," specifically, the slave narrative. Bamikunle points to the comments many black writers made during the Harlem Renaissance about the struggle to appeal to both a black and a white audience. "For blacks who felt a strong obligation towards the black race there was bound to be conflict between that obligation and the constraints of writing within a white culture," he argues.

The Harlem Renaissance was not an exclusively male event, and some critics have chosen to highlight black women's roles in the achievements of the period. While Cheryl Wall, writing in *Women, the Arts, and the 1920s in Paris and New York*, admits that no female black writer working during the 1920s and 1930s came close to the talent and skill exhibited by many of the era's leading male writers, she adds that black women "were doubly oppressed, as blacks and as women, and they were highly aware of the degrading stereotypes commonly applied to them." For this reason, she believes, black women poets often wrote more restrained poetry and prose than their male counterparts.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Sanderson holds a master of fine arts degree in fiction writing and is an independent writer. In this essay, Sanderson looks at how the Harlem Renaissance writers succeeded in creating a literature of pioneering.

The literature of the Harlem Renaissance was produced by a generation of writers steeped in ideas illuminated most clearly by Howard University philosophy professor and intellectual Alain Locke. Locke first referred to the concept of the New Negro in an article in the March 1925 issue of *Survey Graphic*, a special issue of the journal entitled *Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro*.

In one of the issue's articles, which he expanded later that year into the introduction for his anthology of the best African-American writing, *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, Locke defines the New Negro as one who has thrown off the ageworn stereotypes of the subservient and docile black. For generations of white Americans, he notes, blacks have been "something to be argued about, condemned or defended, to be 'kept down,' or 'in his place,' or 'helped up,' . . . harassed or patronized, a social bogey or a social burden." In place of the "Old Negro" comes the New Negro, "vibrant with a new psychology" reflecting that "a new spirit is awake in the masses." Locke expected this new and talented group of African-American artists—many whose work appeared in *Survey Graphic* and later in his anthology—to recreate and improve the image of the race through their art, in hopes that blacks would finally become appreciated by white society.

This was a tall order for barely more than a handful of people. The economic and social conditions of most black Americans at the turn of the century and after World War I were somewhere between deplorable and less-than-adequate. Though their work could not undo hundreds of years of racism and second-class status, the writers of the Harlem Renaissance did succeed in giving a voice to a generation of black pioneers: blacks who followed a grand American tradition by leaving impoverished and difficult conditions for the promise of a better life. Their migratory route was within the United States, primarily from the rural south to the industrial north, and they created strong and vibrant cities and neighborhoods built on their dreams.

In fact, Houston A. Baker, Jr., in his book *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, argues that Locke's anthology is similar to "the valued documents from which we grasp iconic images and pictorial myths of a colonial or frontier America." Locke succeeded, according to Baker, in writing "our first *national* book, offering . . . the sounds, songs, images, and signs of a nation."

Most American students can recite from memory the stories of immigrants leaving their homelands and coming to the United States in hopes of finding something more—whether the story is about the Pilgrims fleeing religious persecution or others leaving a homeland inflamed with war or devastated by famine or poverty. Even after sailing across oceans, those immigrants participated in the nation's strong tradition of internal migration to move to the western United States, the next state, or the next town when opportunity presented itself. But African Americans at the turn of the century were, for the most part, the children and grandchildren of a people forcibly brought to America rather than offered the opportunity to migrate. That opportunity has always been, in a sense, one of the defining characteristics of being American; as a people, we have always counted on being able to pick up and start over in another place. Only after the official end to slavery in the United States were African Americans able to participate in this very American activity.

The Great Migration, roughly from the 1890s through the first half of the twentieth century, saw literally millions of blacks moving from their southern homes to northern urban centers in search of decent jobs and a life free from fear. Between 1885 and 1905, there were more lynchings in the nation than there were legal executions. In many parts of the South, tenant farming and sharecropping□ systems in which the farmers often found themselves in perpetual debt to the landowners□ had depleted the soil's fertility and kept the price of cotton low through the beginning of the twentieth century. Working at other jobs, after their crops had failed, left blacks frustrated at their low wages and limited opportunities. Black men's voting rights were often denied through poll taxes and literacy tests. Like other Americans before them, blacks began a migration that changed the face of the nation. For example, New York City's African-American population jumped 50 percent between 1910 and 1920.

Of course, the north was no paradise. Very often, blacks received low wages and were treated just as poorly as they had been back home. When World War I finished, and white soldiers returned to their northern cities wanting jobs, blacks were often the first employees fired.

The fact remained, however, that blacks in huge numbers had taken a step to redefine themselves by choosing where they would live and how they would live. They were at the same time participating in another great American tradition: that of re-envisioning oneself and one's people through stories.

Locke's proclamation of the New Negro was a clear indication of this, and his publication of black poetry, fiction, and essays in his anthology was the literal retelling of those stories. Nathan I. Huggins, writing in his book *Harlem Renaissance*, notes that white Americans have forever desired to cast themselves as new and improved, primarily to separate themselves from their Old World origins. This separation, of course, has always been paired with a corresponding desire to associate oneself with the Old World by taking pride in the cast-off ancestral country. The changes in black society at the beginning of the twentieth century and the development of the Harlem Renaissance, according to Huggins, afforded blacks a similar opportunity to take part in this "intense and national sport" by declaring that the New Negro had been born and was ready to acknowledge his ties to, and appreciation of, ancestral Africa.

The writers of this era were creating the literature of pioneers, people of a new land, and in doing so writers worked to develop the stories that would tell the rest of the world (and white America) what defined them, what made them proud, and what troubled them. Countee Cullen's poem "Heritage," included in Locke's special *Survey Graphic* issue, is a love song to ancestral Africa, for example, but tempered with a sense of regret and caution. He desires to be swept up in the continent's heat and passion but realizes that as someone who is "civilized," he must tell himself to "Quench my pride and cool my blood." Zora Neale Hurston stays closer to home in her subject matter but still recalls the land of her forebears (the rural South, from where so many blacks had migrated) in her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Hurston follows Janie, a black woman living in rural Florida, and her lifelong search for fulfillment and identity as a woman.

Claude McKay, through his poems and his fictional characters, often wrote about the plight of African Americans in an angry and defiant fashion. Also included in the special *Survey Graphic*, McKay's poem *White Houses*, challenges the racist attitudes and practices of whites against blacks. He opens the poem noticing that "your door is shut against my tightened face," and he is "sharp as steel with discontent" in the next line. But by the end of the poem, McKay warns himself to avoid becoming involved in "the potent poison" of the white man's hate. In his novel *Home to Harlem*, McKay casts two opposites as protagonists: Ray, who, like McKay, is a well-educated black but uncomfortable with Harlem's festive atmosphere and struggling to fit into either white or black society; and Jake, a black man who leads an untroubled life filled with party-going. Eventually, it becomes apparent that Ray's association with whites, specifically through his bourgeois education, has damaged his identity as a black man, and he flees the new world of Harlem for the Old World of Europe.

A question remains, however, if one looks upon these writers as the voices of migrants and pioneers. Pioneers are usually pictured as a hopeful lot; indeed, much of Locke's language in describing the New Negro in the *Survey Graphic* special issue is optimistic: he uses words such as "genius," "vibrant," and "metamorphosis," and comments that these young writers "have all swung above the horizon." But Daylanne K. English raises a good point in her *Critical Inquiry*, when she argues that "Renaissance writers were, in fact, preoccupied by the possibility and the picturing of various modern, and only sometimes racially specific, wastelands." Indeed, looking at the work of McKay and others, the energetic and optimistic pioneers of the Harlem Renaissance may have realized that, despite Locke's belief that art would mend racial fences, some tough times lay ahead. Their words, according to English, seem to testify to "a clear and widespread sense of urgency, even of anxiety and despair." This combination of hope and anxiety about the future, in fact, is apparent in Langston Hughes's "The Dream Keeper":

Bring me all of your dreams
You dreamers.
Bring me all of your
Heart melodies.
That I may wrap them
In a blue cloud-cloth
Away from the too rough fingers
Of the world.

Indeed, the voice sounded by the writers of the Harlem Renaissance offered a sense of both hopefulness and caution to those who would listen. Black writers would continue to work and produce fine results□ Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison in the 1940s and 1950s, Maya Angelou and Alice Walker in the century's latter years□but Locke's hope that the best and the brightest of the black pioneers could wash away the sins of a nation never came about.

Source: Susan Sanderson, Critical Essay on the Harlem Renaissance, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Perry profiles novels and novelists of the Harlem Renaissance.

There were no novels by Harlem Renaissance writers of major importance in general American literature during the 1920s. All of the black writers were in the massive shadow of literary luminaries such as Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Sinclair Lewis. There were novels of major and minor importance, however, among black writers; every principal writer produced at least one novel during the years 1924-1932. The release of artistic expression gathered momentum beginning in 1924 when *The Crisis* and *Opportunity* announced creative writing contests and Jessie Fauset and Walter White published their first novels. In 1927, for instance, the black literary output was an unchecked flow of poetry and prose that wound in and around periodicals and publishing houses on the eastern literary scene. Rudolph Fisher had six short stories which appeared throughout the year, Cullen edited a collection of poetry by Negroes, *Caroling Dusk*, and two of his own books of poetry, *Copper Sun* and *The Ballad of the Brown Girl* appeared. Hughes's second book, *Fine Clothes to the Jew*, gave the black press an outlet for denouncing a movement that could not now be stopped. On the other hand, the publication of James Weldon Johnson's *God's Trombones* drew praise from the critics even though he anticipated a chorus of rebuke from them because he consciously avoided dialect. One may safely assert that in the year 1927 dialect was declared dead. (One important exception, of course, was the work of Sterling Brown.)

The prevailing notion of the fiction of the Harlem Renaissance writers during the 1920s was that it exaggerated the more offensive qualities of low-life in the black ghetto□drink, sex, gambling, violence, and exotic behavior. The truth is that the literature spanning the period of the Harlem Renaissance, roughly from 1923 through 1932, focused on *every* aspect of black life. The portrayal of low-life was part of the trend toward freeing readers from seeing the black person as a problem; it was also an attempt to portray blackness with a candor that the newer writers felt had been lacking in the literature of the past. In fiction, several angles of black life were explored in order to emphasize the harsh injustice of prejudice, the basic human worth of the black race, the bourgeois life of blacks, the irrepressible spontaneity and vitality of the race, and the search for a common heritage, so that, in the words of Countee Cullen, blacks would not have to sing:

What is last year's snow to me,
Last year's anything? The tree
Budding yearly must forget
How its past arose or set□

. . .
One three centuries removed
From the scenes his fathers loved,
Spicy grove, cinnamon tree,
What is Africa to me?

The overall controlling symbol of blackness formed the basis for the major themes explored in the fiction and poetry of the Harlem Renaissance writers. In various plot modes and poetic outpourings, the themes of passing, miscegenation, the "tragic mulatto," the Negro's struggle for selfassertion, violence (mostly white), forms of prejudice (white against black, black against black), and the vitality of the Negro were recurrent in the works of these young writers. Some of the works were in the form of propaganda; some offerings bordered on or succumbed to the cult of exoticism; still other works presented a realistic portrayal of Negro life. The novel, of course, was the perfect vehicle for exploring all of the concerns which the Negro writer wished to portray and explicate.

The mediocre novels written by Negroes (e.g., Herman Dreer, Mary Etta Spencer) who preceded the Harlem Renaissance novelists were not immediately replaced by examples of high art. After all, the oral tradition was still the most potent influence on the black artist. The unique need felt by some to propagandize through fiction also hindered other writers from recognizing and employing the better tools of fiction. The body of Harlem Renaissance novels, therefore, is unevenly chiseled, but the primary aim of all Negro novelists, regardless of their style or thematic preoccupation, was to act as truthful interpreters of the black race for the reading public. No longer would there be the fiction of distortion, created by writers who lacked knowledge of the black world or who actually believed in the existing black stereotypes. The Negro novelist of the past, Chesnutt and Dunbar included, had sometimes succumbed to the same easy habits of the white writers in portraying the Negro in caricature. A conscious attempt was made during the 1920s and early 1930s to rid readers of the idea that the black character was a little less than human or so pious and patient in the face of oppression that he achieved an otherworldly sanctification that strained credibility. The one character that the Harlem Renaissance writers seemed unable (or, perhaps, unwilling) to purge from their postbellum literary heritage was the "tragic mulatto." Of course, it can be argued, without straining too greatly, that this type was a real part of the everyday world the Negro writer of the 1920s knew.

To grasp the intent of the various writers and to understand how they attempted to articulate their concerns through artistic expression, individual novels must be examined. The working out of themes and the crystallization of black life and culture were abundant in the novels of the following writers: Rudolph Fisher, Claude McKay, Nella Larsen, James Weldon Johnson, Countee Cullen, and Langston Hughes, whose works will be discussed in this chapter.The novels of Wallace Thurman, Jessie Fauset, Walter White, W. E. B. DuBois, Arna Bontemps, and George Schuyler will be discussed in the next chapter.

Rudolph Fisher was a literary craftsman who understood and practiced such arts of fiction as control over plot, characterization, tone, and language, and who had a natural poise in exposition. Fisher was as at ease writing novels as he was writing short stories, although the short stories are of greater artistic quality. Fisher is one of those writers about whom one would like to speculate, "If only he had lived longer"; even so, his accomplishments by 1934 (he died in December of that year) were far from negligible. His first novel, *The Walls of Jericho*, for instance, contains one of the most amusing yet cynical scenes (the Merritt- Cramp conversation) in modern literature. He was the first black writer to have a creditable and absorbing mystery published in America (*The Conjure- man Dies*). As a stylist, Fisher had no peer among the nonexperimental Harlem Renaissance writers. This skill, however, led to his most notable weakness□a clever adroitness that makes his satire somewhat strained in some instances, and, related to this, a feather-light style that sometimes blurs his dramatic impact.

The Walls of Jericho (1928) is a study in black realistic fiction, for Fisher follows closely the dictum of Henry James in giving his novel an "air of reality" (as opposed to representing life) through his concern with mimesis rather than theme and form. (This is stated merely for contrast, not in terms of exclusion; Fisher was certainly concerned, as a stylist, with form, and as a man caught up in the spirit of the Harlem Renaissance, he was not oblivious to the importance of theme and motif.) An early commentator on the Harlem Renaissance wrote about Fisher:

> [His] realism does not go searching after exotic places, but walks the streets of Harlem with its lowly. His interest dwells upon transplanted southern country folk who, having reached the city, have not yet had bound upon their natures the *aes triplex* of city sophistication. They are simple, funloving folk, sometimes religious, more usually superstitious, leaning ardently toward the good but not too zealously to be sometimes led astray by bewildering temptations.

There is a plot and subplot in *The Walls of Jericho*, where all strata of Negro society in New York City are represented□the uneducated lower classes (but not the poverty-stricken), the gamblers, the middle class, and the so-called upper class. The hero, Ralph Merrit, a lawyer by profession, can be counted among the few in this last category. He is, in the words of the common Negro, a "dickty," and he receives little support or sympathy at the opening of the book where it is revealed that he has bought a house in a white neighborhood just bordering on Harlem. Despite this move, the extremely pale (but kinky-haired) Merrit has none of the pretentions often present in Negroes of his class, even though it is assumed that he does by the characters Fisher presents in contrast to him□Shine (Joshua Jones), and Jinx and Bubber (Fisher's black Damon and Pythias). As a matter of fact, Merrit's reason for moving into the white neighborhood is not obvious. As he explains:

> All of you know where I stand on things racial□I'm downright rabid. And even though . . . I'd enjoy this house, if they let me alone, purely as an individual, just the same I'm entering it as a Negro. I hate fays. Always have. Always will. Chief joy in life is making them uncomfortable. And if this doesn't do it□ I'll quit the bar.

Side by side with the story of Merrit is the romance between Shine and the Negro maid, Linda. She works for Miss Cramp, a bigoted neighbor of Merrit, who sees herself as an enlightened benefactor of the downtrodden and misguided. Miss Cramp takes on causes the way sticky tape picks up lint, and her interest is as short-lived as lintcovered adhesive is useful. Her arrogant notions of racial superiority are mitigated only by her evident obtuseness and sheer ignorance. Such a restricted, narrow mind is beyond repair, as her name implies: she stands as a symbol of the blind, bigoted dogooder who clutters the world with unproductive activities and confused motives. She is also unfortunately a victim of Fisher's penchant for caricature; the light touch he applies to Miss Cramp lessens the magnitude of what she really symbolizes. Still, it is possible that her name will become as meaningful to the literate reader as the name Babbitt, thereby enriching the descriptive language of America.

The work companions, Shine, Jinx, and Bubber, provide the book with comic characters and also furnish the reader with an insight into staple personalities in black society□persons who are (or, perhaps, were) rarely seen outside of Harlem (at least, in their true character) and therefore remain a mystery to the white world. To citizens of Harlem, the prototypes of Jinx and Bubber were in evidence daily. They add as much to an air of reality as do the places described in the various scenes. Both men conform analogically to the black joker hero and, in a more tenuous fashion, to the trickster hero.

Thematically, Fisher was concerned with the idea of black unity and the discovery of self. He uses the Bible story of Joshua to reinforce his concern for the black man's search for his true nature that will permit him to disengage himself from the deceptions of the past. Every man is Joshua, facing a seemingly impenetrable wall:

No man knows himself till he comes to an impasse;
to some strange set of conditions that reveals to him
his ignorance of the workings of his spirit; to some
disrupting impact that shatters the wall of self-illusion.
This, I believe, is the greatest spiritual battle of
a man's life, the battle with his own idea of himself.

It is such knowledge that draws divergent segments of the black population□the Ralph Merrits and the Joshua Joneses□into a unity that can do battle with the white enemy inside the walls of Jericho.

Fisher's second book, *The Conjure-man Dies* (1932), is the first black detective novel published in the United States. The book was an important addition to the literature of the Harlem Renaissance because it exhibited again Fisher's abiding interest in his race and the formulation of ties with the African homeland. Fisher believed that Harlem was a natural setting for the mystery novel:

Darkness and mystery go together, don't they? The
children of the night□and I say this in all seriousness□
are children of mystery. The very setting is
mystery□outsiders know nothing of Harlem life as

> it really is . . . what goes on behind the scenes and beneath the dark skins of Harlem folk—fiction has not found much of that yet. And much of it is perfectly in tune with the best of mystery tradition—variety, color, mysticism, superstition, malice and violence.

The semicomic Jinx and Bubber appear in this book also. They liven the action and the conversation, contributing some touches of comic relief to the peculiar, mysterious atmosphere. They were Fisher's favorite characters, "who," as he said, "having shared several adventures with me before, have become very real to me."

Fisher was also fascinated by the technique of constructing a mystery novel—the mingling of fact and fiction, and the opportunity to commence what was to have become, had Fisher lived, a corpus of detective novels known as the Dart-Archer series. In discussing *The Conjure-man Dies*, Fisher stated: "An archer, of course, is a bowman, one who shoots an arrow. Dart is another word for arrow. Dr. Archer and Detective Dart, therefore, stand in the relationship of a bowman and his arrow; the vision of the former gives direction and aim to the action of the latter." The book also gave Fisher a grand chance not only to vivify Harlem as a place of clubs and cabarets but to portray it as the home of the ordinary black folk who supply most of its color and movement.

When Claude McKay died in 1948, it was noted that "it was a request of Mr. McKay that his funeral service be held in Harlem, where he spent so much of his active life." McKay spent the years between 1922 and 1934 out of the United States, but the memory of Harlem and all that it meant to him, both symbolically and sensually, never faded from his mind, even when he had lost some of his younger fervor for its haunts.

McKay was damned as a novelist by DuBois and others (even James Weldon Johnson did not like *Home to Harlem*) who felt that McKay exploited the theme of Negro primitivism and leaned too heavily on the effects of exotic descriptions of lowlife. The formless aspect of his narratives was also disconcerting. This was so even though he included, for example, a subtitle, "A story without a plot," on the title page of the novel *Banjo*. The formlessness, therefore, was clearly intentional.

One of McKay's assets was his unambivalent attitude toward race: he was a black man and he was proud of it. He wasn't interested in assimilation, although he had a forceful streak of the European aesthete in him which he neither exalted nor damned. He once wrote: "Whatever may be the criticism implied in my writing of Western civilization I do not regard myself as a stranger but as a child of it, even though I may have become so by the comparatively recent process of grafting. I am as conscious of my new-world birthright as of my African origin, being aware of the one and its significance in my development as much as I feel the other emotionally." This dualistic sentiment did not mean that he was not conscious of the problem his color presented. One must not forget McKay's own admission that "my main psychological problem . . . was the problem of color. Color-consciousness was the fundamental of my restlessness." McKay was satisfied with his own understanding of himself and his dual heritage; what saddened and often exasperated him was the lack of understanding he found among whites who could not envision how a man as civilized as McKay could refuse to accept the European, Anglo-Saxon value system. This dualism, a problem not to be solved by a simple statement incorporating the idea that the black race had a respectable past, one different from whites but equal to it in terms of the values that were transmitted from one generation to the next, was simply one more result of the white man's refusal to legitimize black experience. As McKay saw it, then, the problem really wasn't his alone; the white person had to share the responsibility for placing McKay, and others like him, in two worlds. And when one exists in two worlds, one can hardly be completely loyal to either of them. McKay understood this, but many of his critics, he surmised, did not.

A spiritual and intellectual cleavage existed as well between McKay and the black bourgeois writers of the Harlem Renaissance. McKay was keenly aware of the inner struggles of the younger black writers. Thus, he portrays his concern about every aspect of blackness, the black soul, and the "new Negro" through Ray, who becomes his spokesman in both of his vagabond novels. These same concerns are also a part of his autobiography, *A Long Way from Home* (1937).

When *Home to Harlem* appeared in 1928, McKay was accused of being too greatly influenced by Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven*. McKay defended himself against this unsubstantiated charge when his book first appeared; later, in his autobiography, he explained:

> Many persons imagine that I wrote *Home to Harlem* because Carl Van Vechten wrote *Nigger Heaven* . But the pattern of the book was written under the title of "Home to Harlem " in 1925. When Max Eastman read it he said, "It is worth a thousand dollars." Under the same title it was entered in the story contest of the Negro magazine *Opportunity*.But it did not excite the judges. *Nigger Heaven* was published in the fall of 1926. I never saw the book until the late spring of 1927, when my agent . . . sent me a copy. And by that time I had nearly completed *Home to Harlem*.

This explanation ought to be accepted not only because it seems convincing but also because both novels are each so different that the question of Van Vechten's influence becomes academic.

Home to Harlem is a vagabond novel, full of color, noise, and vitality, rounded out by a touch of intellectualism and social criticism. The story is loosely structured around the search by Jake, the primary character, for the "tantalizing brown" whom he enjoys on his first night in that home of homes for the black man, Harlem. Jake is home from the war—the white man's war—an *AWOL* with a taste for English-made suits, an uncomplicated sensualist who lives each day to its fullest. He is the archetypal primitive who will never succumb to the restraints of Puritan American civilization. At the end of the novel, he finds his girl (who, by the way, left him the $50 during that first joyful night) and discovers her name which, quite appropriately, is Felice ("Joy"). While the movement from beginning to end is episodic and disjointed, the novel is successful in: (1) its portrayal of life in Harlem's cabarets, rent parties, pool rooms, and other dives of the more lowly; (2) its exposure of the mentality and weaknesses of bourgeois life; (3) its exploration of the problems of the Negro intellectual (i.e., a person overly cultivated in norms alien to his origins and, therefore, an unhappy disaffected individual); and (4) its examination of the nature and place of sex in the black world.

It is an antithetical world which McKay paints, a world rendered in disjointed sentences, slang, and elliptical Negro phrases that ring with authenticity. There may be a little exaggeration, but McKay's contrast of a world within a world requires some overstatement. The antithesis is also internal, for his aim in presenting characters like Ray and Jake is not to juxtapose opposing elements of society but, more important, to give two sides of the contradictory nature of man: sensual man vs. sensible man.

This kind of probing is an important element in McKay's novel *Banjo* (1929). Ray is also a key character in this book, and Jake is replaced by his counterpart, the Banjo of the title. The book is peopled with men and women who inhabit the fringes of "respectable" society. They live around the waterfront in Marseilles where their existence is a combination of the grim, the grimy, and the happygo- lucky. The most important segments of the book deal with Ray's tirades against the black American for his aping of whites and discursive conversations that explain McKay's sentiments about the Harlem Renaissance. Here, for instance, is Ray talking to a Martiniquan student:

'In the modern race of life we're merely beginners.
If this renaissance we're talking about is going to be
more than a sporadic and scabby thing, we'll have to
get down to our racial roots to create it.'

'I believe in a racial renaissance,' said the student,
'but not in going back to savagery.'

'Getting down to our native roots and building up
from our own people,' said Ray, 'is not savagery. It
is culture.'

'I can't see that,' said the student.

'You are like many Negro intellectuals who are bellyaching
about race,' said Ray. 'What's wrong with
you all is your education. You get a white man's education
and learn to despise your own people. . .

'You're a lost crowd, you educated Negroes, and you
will find yourself in the roots of your own people.'

From such episodes, something can be learned about McKay as Ray's attitudes waver from bitterness to tenderness to moral confusion. At the book's end Ray retains some of his ambivalence, although he makes a positive choice to remain, at least for a time, in the sensual world. His decision, then, is made with an air of one who is still experimenting with notions of how to live one's life.

McKay's last novel, *Banana Bottom* (1933), is not within the basic time or thematic scope of this book and will not be discussed. In one critic's view it "is the first classic of West Indian prose." The West Indian tone and mood prevail in McKay's collection of short stories, too, although the Harlem stories have greater artistic strength. *Gingertown* (1932) contains twelve examples of McKay's short fiction. The Harlem tales, in particular, give an intimate and vivid portrait of Renaissance Harlem. For example, "Brownskin Blues," a story of another Mary Lou (Thurman's), is about a woman whose black skin leads to tragedy. "Mattie and Her Sweetman" portrays the life of an older woman who is supporting a young man. In both of these stories, crude as they are, McKay exhibits control over his characterizations and the setting. "High Ball" is another of his successful tales, in terms of theme and characterization; the protagonist, Nation, is sympathetically and realistically portrayed (see Chapter 7 for further discussion of this story). In this story McKay explores a virulent form of race prejudice and expresses one aspect of the black man's struggle for self-assertion. Curiously, the West Indian tales are the weakest in the book, but they are written with such a lyrical nostalgia that the stories have a unique, seductive quality.

McKay's importance in the Harlem Renaissance is undisputed, even though he was physically absent from the United States during its height. His almost obsessive concern with the nature of contradiction in the black man's character compelled him to write fiction and poetry which embrace many of the earmarks of Harlem Renaissance literature.

McKay, like Cullen, was unable to fulfill his potential, although the body of McKay's work is not unimpressive. What seems to be lacking in his work is a certain breadth which he might have displayed if he had continued in the direction in which he started when he wrote *Banana Bottom*. In it he seems to have turned to another level of expression, the orthodox novel, but he ceased producing significant artistic literature at this point in his life. Stephen H. Bronz assesses McKay in this perceptive summation of his role in the Harlem Renaissance:

Because McKay was not fully a member of any one group, and because of his radical education and outspoken personality, he set the outer limits of the Harlem Renaissance. No other important Negro writer in the 'twenties protested so fiercely and single-mindedly against prejudice as did McKay in his sonnets of 1919. And no other important Renaissance figure disregarded possible effects on the Negro public image so fearlessly as did McKay in his prose fiction. From his Jamaican days to his strange conversion

to Catholicism, McKay forever spoke his
mind, sometimes brilliantly, sometimes clumsily, but
always forthrightly. In so doing he did much to make
the Harlem Renaissance more than a polite attempt
to show whites that Negroes, too, could be cultured.

Robert Bone places Nella Larsen, along with Jessie Fauset, W. E. B. DuBois, and Walter White, in the class of "The Rear Guard," that is, "novelists [who] still wished to orient Negro art toward white opinion. They wished to apprise educated whites of the existence of respectable Negroes, and to call their attention—now politely, now indignantly— to facts of racial injustice.

Nella Larsen was a descendant of two widely different racial and cultural backgrounds: her father was a West Indian Negro and her mother was Danish. Larsen's own origins and the subsequent unfulfilled life she led as the wife of an adulterer (whom she finally divorced) provided her with the material for her life's work. Certainly she followed the admonition to young writers to "write what you know about" in her first novel, *Quicksand*. The theme of the tragic mulatto is merged with what Bone describes as the basic metaphor of the novel which is "contained in its title [and] supported throughout by concrete images of suffocation, asphyxiation, and claustrophobia." The story of Helga Crane, daughter of a black man and a Danish woman whom he deserted, is obviously patterned on Larsen's early life. Supported by a sympathetic uncle after her mother's death, Helga grows up with all the bourgeois inclinations of the black middle class. Deep within her, however, is a desire to repudiate the ethic of the bourgeoisie. "The woman as bitch," resting latent within Helga, causes her final doom as she settles into the "quicksand" of a mediocre domesticity. The downward, symbolically circular path to this suffocating pit (her marriage and the South) moves via a series of sharply etched episodes that reveal Larsen's skill at characterization. She shows that she is well aware of the "craft of fiction"; there is vividness, truth (especially in her revelations of a woman's inner life), and an ability to create scenes of encounters among people even though she fails to be entirely convincing in her ending. However, even Percy Lubbock, in *The Craft of Fiction*, notes that an author may lack some part of the craft and still succeed.

Clearly, the plot is subordinate to the characterizations. Helga Crane moves from the stultifying atmosphere of a southern Negro college to New York, via a brief stay in Chicago where she is scorned by her sympathetic white uncle's new wife. Thus, rejected with finality by the American branch of her family, Helga settles in Harlem where she finds temporary contentment. Helga's life is a series of only evanescent fulfillments, for she is plagued with a restlessness that has deeper causes than Miss Larsen bothers to penetrate. It is in Harlem that Helga cultivates and develops her "black" soul. Her embracing of this blackness is emotionally incomplete at this juncture, however. At the beginning of her life in Harlem she reflects:

Everything was there [in Harlem], vice and goodness,
sadness and gayety, ignorance and wisdom, ugliness
and beauty, poverty and richness. And it

seemed to her that somehow of goodness, gayety, wisdom, and beauty always there was a little more than of vice, sadness, ignorance, and ugliness. It was only riches that did not quite transcend poverty. 'But,' said Helga Crane, 'what of that? Money isn't everything. It isn't even the half of everything. And here we have so much else—and by ourselves. It's only outside of Harlem among those others that money really counts for everything.'

This passage foreshadows a reverse in Helga's attitude; for when she moves from the black world into the white one of her rich relatives in Denmark she momentarily relinquishes the moral superiority of her black universe:

She liked it, this new life. For a time it blotted from her mind all else. . . To Helga Crane it was the realization of a dream that she had dreamed persistently ever since she was old enough to remember such vague things as day-dreams and longings. Always she had wanted, not money, but the things which money could give, leisure, attention, beautiful surroundings. Things. Things.

Helga Crane, a nervous and somewhat complex character, is one of the more interesting creations found in the Harlem Renaissance novels. For one thing, she is one female of the bourgeois who displays a desire to be sexually fulfilled. In her decision to reject the physical and social comforts of the white (or, as Harlem Renaissance writers termed it, Nordic) world for the warmth and vitality of the black one, Helga fits the Renaissance's persistent pattern. By fitting into this mold and accepting her blackness, Helga begins to understand what motivated her father's desertion:

For the first time Helga Crane felt sympathy rather than contempt and hatred for that father, who so often and so angrily she had blamed for his desertion of her mother. She understood, now, his rejection, his repudiation, of the formal calm her mother had represented. She understood his yearning, his intolerable need for the inexhaustible humor and the incessant hope of his own kind, his need for those things, not material, indigenous to all Negro environments.

At this point Helga finds release from false values and commences the backward journey into her true black self. She selects religion to carry her back into the bosom of blackness. The portrait of Helga from this point to the end becomes blurred and confusing. After her "conversion," she turns to Pleasant Green, a greasy, sweaty, mediocre preacher; despite the Oedipal implication of the search for a father, this major move is unconvincing. One explanation for the confused motivation near the end of the book may be that she tired of writing in the midst of describing Helga's Copenhagen experiences. Suddenly, it seems, Helga gives up living and accepts an existence that will limp along in a wearisome, depressing manner.

The reader is left with an inkling that Larsen decided to make Helga forget that part of her past that made her fight for the things she wanted. The author, in an attempt to rescue herself artistically from the book's weak ending, inserts a scene which may provide a clue to what she intended. Helga requests a reading of Anatole France's "The Procurator of Judea." Just as Pilate let himself forget the momentous event of his condemnation of Christ, so Helga, it appears, in requesting to hear this ironic tale, seems to be telling the reader that she is simply going to forget the past. Larsen's skillful use of this device, however, does not compensate for the unsatisfactory religious motivation Helga is given for becoming Mrs. Pleasant Green in the first place.

Nella Larsen's second novel, *Passing* (1929), is written in that hasty, seminonchalant style that put her a notch above some of her black peers of this period in terms of simple narrative technique. Therefore, even though the narrative moves smoothly in *Passing*, the story itself is inconsequential. The ending is melodramatic and, again (surely a Larsen weakness), unconvincing. One is not sure whether Larsen intends the reader to view Clare Kendry's death as suicide (intentional? accidental?) or murder (intentional? accidental?). It is entirely possible that she wanted this confusion to persist forever in the reader's mind, but this certainly does not give the book any artistic complexity that might intrigue the imagination.

One important feature of Larsen's work that is clearly evident here, as it is in *Quicksand*, is her awareness of female sexuality. The latent desire for sexual fulfillment that Helga satisfies with her marriage to the gross preacher is akin to Clare's attraction to her friend's husband. In both cases, the black man either symbolizes or brings sexual gratification, thereby reinforcing the Renaissance view that it is the black, and not the white, race that is fertile, vital, full-bodied, and rich in humaneness.

Miss Larsen never fulfilled the promise of her early successes, and she disappeared from the literary scene after an unpleasant exposure and accusation concerning plagiarism.

A date, or time itself, perhaps, is meaningless within itself; that added element, amplification, is needed to give significance to a date. *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* is a case in point: this single novel by James Weldon Johnson was published under a pseudonym in 1912. Its inclusion in a study of the Harlem Renaissance, however, is relevant because of its plot and treatment of racial prejudice in a mode that parallels other novels of this period. Moreover, its reissue in 1927 demonstrates that Johnson's contemporaries also saw the novel as akin to the Harlem Renaissance literature. This book forcefully upholds the notion that Johnson can be promoted as being a precursor of the Harlem Renaissance. The 1927 edition contained an introduction by Johnson's good friend, Carl Van Vechten.

Despite its deceptive title, this book remains one of the most accomplished pieces of lengthy fiction written by a Negro during the first four decades of the twentieth century. It is a dispassionate picture of what it was like to grow up nearly white in the racist society of the early part of this century. The prejudice against blacks was blatantly illogical and so rampant that no excuses were needed. The protagonist of Johnson's novel, knowing the truth of "label a mulatto white and the world's view of him adopts the label," finally succumbs to the advantages of uncomplicated day-to-day living as a "passer." Even so, at the novel's end, he states: "I cannot repress the thought that, after all, I have chosen the lesser part, that I have sold my birthright for a mess of pottage."

The melancholy of Johnson's protagonist, as well as his cowardice, are not romantic poses. In this novel Johnson implants a psychological motif which appears again and again in the literature of the Harlem Renaissance, namely, the belief that the Negro who abandons his people also forsakes a richness that cannot be replaced by the superficial freedom which passing into the white world accords. This motif appeared, for example, in nearly all of the works of Jessie Fauset, Walter White, Claude McKay, and Nella Larsen and was certainly implied in Rudolph Fisher's work and in Countee Cullen's one novel.

The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man is a mingling of realism and irony. The realism is of the simplest kind: Johnson portrays in rich, convincing detail several strata of Negro life in the South and the East. The irony is perhaps unintentional: the whole narrative is, first, one of understatement and, second, one in which the hero's life changes direction radically after one episode—the loss of money for college—which the author intimates as being the "irony of fate." Irony operates rather successfully, too, when we realize that the hero's decision to pass, after his seemingly objective review of both sides, fails to give him the happiness he had expected. Dispassionate objectivity may lead to nowhere, the author seems to say.

Briefly, the novel follows the life of an unnamed light-skinned protagonist who, upon leaving the South at an early, undisclosed age, is reared in genteel, middle-class comfort in Connecticut. He does not discover the fact or meaning of being a Negro until he is ten, when an embarrassing classroom situation forces this fact upon his sensitive nature. Even then, his life is relatively calm, and he successfully completes his adolescence, aloof from most of his classmates but not entirely isolated. The hero, musically talented, proceeds southward to enter Atlanta University. His money is stolen during his first day there; but rather than explain his unhappy circumstances to the university administrators, he gives up college life and commences his life of wandering and his search for self. The conflict that wars within begins to emerge at this point: he wishes to become the best sort of Negro, to present to the world the Negro's musical heritage, and, the easier wish to satisfy, to gratify himself as just another man in the world, to enjoy the normal, even routine joys experienced by the middle- or upper-middle-class white American. As the title of the book suggests, the "hero" finally chooses the last goal. The story follows his wanderings from work in a cigar factory, to piano playing in a club, to travels in Europe with his rich employer, and to the United States again where he collects Negro folk songs. But he now abandons his race, not simply for love of a white woman but also because of the contradictions of his nature.

On the one hand, as he says, "I have been only a privileged spectator of their [Negroes] inner life," and on the other, "I am possessed by a strange longing for my mother's people."

As evidenced by the society Johnson describes as well as the duality of the protagonist's nature, the novel can be said to be within that tradition of duality dominant in American fiction. The tradition is clear in the protagonist's inner contradictions and the struggles of good and evil within him, demonstrated in his circumstances, his actions, and, most dramatically, his inner turmoil which makes him realize that he has sold his birthright "for a mess of pottage." This intermingling of black and white taints the hero's moral character much as his physical being was tainted in the belief of American society that such an offspring, the product of racial intermingling, was a corrupted version of the human species. Through the act of passing, the protagonist assumes the role of one who has failed once again to demonstrate personal integrity. There is a continual relinquishing of values portrayed through the actions of the protagonist; for instance, the acquiescence to the easier way out of a dilemma (not going to college), or his lack of shame when confronted with a lapse in his moral character (the chasing and tormenting of a black boy from his school). And, of course, his "passing" is his greatest act of moral cowardice.

There is a quality of the *bildungsroman* in Johnson's work, although the forays into black propaganda and the hero's remaining air of perennial questioning of his chosen path in life weaken the impression that Johnson perceived the book on this level. Indeed, in his autobiography he is curiously reticent about discussing his book in a literary sense and seems more concerned with emphasizing that *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* was fiction rather than the story of his life.

Although the writers of the Harlem Renaissance were not oblivious to the influence of the black man's religion in shaping his character, they rarely used religious settings for their novels. The prominent exception, Countee Cullen, is not surprising, inasmuch as he was the adopted son of a minister. Cullen's single novel, *One Way to Heaven*, was published during the waning days of the Harlem Renaissance (1932), but it bears the marks of a Renaissance novel. It is, in Cullen's words, a "two toned picture" which explores the lives of the upper and lower strata of Negro life in Harlem during the 1920s.

Cullen wrote to his good friend, Harold Jackman, and talked of Flaubert: "I would give years of my life to learn to write like that [re *Madame Bovary*] . . . I suppose Flaubert devoted his entire life to mastering words and studying human emotions. Art such as his takes a lifetime to develop." Cullen, though never a Flaubert, achieved a polish in language and an emotional depth in *One Way to Heaven* that clearly can be traced to his admiration of the great masters. It is one of the better novels of the Harlem Renaissance period.

The novel's two stories are frequently interwoven, but it is still primarily a novel with two different stories, one in contrast with the other because two different realms of Harlem life are explored. Indeed, some readers may consider this narrative mode the major weakness of the novel. To be fair to Cullen, between the significance of the title and the focusing upon Sam Lucas at the beginning and the ending, it seems that the Sam-Mattie love story is the primary one.

The opening scene is laid in a church where an evangelist is speaking during a "watch meeting" night. Sam Lucas, a one-armed con man, enters with the intention of performing his faked act of conversion. It is the eve of a new year, with the evangelist out to catch wayward souls and Sam Lucas out to get the most out of his highly practiced art. He strides to the altar and presents his razor and cards as symbols of his conversion. A young lady in the audience, moved by his action, submits to the "spirit" and is truly converted. Thus, their relationship starts on a compromised basis because of his deceit and her subsequent naïveté in believing that religion, which has brought them together, will shape their future life together. They marry, although Sam encounters difficulties unknown to him before in the wooing and winning of Mattie. This is evident in the following scene, which also serves to illustrate the sacred and profane aspects that form a leitmotif in the novel:

They walked along in a silence which was mainly fear of themselves, fear of the fierce desires at the roots of their beings. . . Sam had forgotten the services of the church as soon and as lightly as he had stepped across its threshold out into the sharp January sun. All that he was concerned with now was the woman at his side. . . He wished he knew how to tackle her; for he felt that she was like some new and strange being, unlike the other women he had known. Those others had been like himself, creatures of action and not of speech. . . He knew when a flippant word meant 'Leave me be.' But this girl . . . She seemed near at hand, as close as if they were linked together by a strip of flesh, yet inaccessible, as if getting religion and joining church had suddenly grown walls about her and shut her away from the world. Her eyes smiled at him, but their message was . . . 'Speak to me' and 'Tell me things.' The palm of his hand was moist with panic.

After marrying, Sam has a hard time keeping up the deception about his new-found religion. He cheats on Mattie, moves out to be with his woman, but returns to Mattie in the end when he is suffering from pneumonia. Just before he dies, he pretends to believe again and Mattie is happy. Cullen suggests that Sam's last act of deception secures his salvation because it is sacrificial.

Mattie is employed as a maid for the Harlem socialite Constancia Brandon, a witty, pretentious, and extravagant woman who mocks as she is mocked. The sycophants who hang about her salon are much more savagely portrayed because they are unaware of the fragility and senselessness of the putative Negro "society." Constancia is well aware of the cracks in the Negro psyche, but she possesses, in addition to intelligence (she is a Radcliffe graduate), common sense and a love for those Negro strengths and unique qualities that enrich life. (The truth or falsity of this premise is not the point, either in this novel or in any of the others that promote the idea of black vitality.) At one point, Constancia states:

I often think the Negro is God Almighty's one mistake, but as I look about me at white people, I am forced to say so are we all. It isn't being colored that annoys me. I could go white if I wanted to, but I am too much of a hedonist; I enjoy life too much, and enjoyment isn't across the line. Money is there, and privilege, and the sort of power which comes with numbers; but as for enjoyment, they don't know what it is.

As viewed through Constancia, then, blacks are implied to be basically superior to whites in terms of warmth, compassion, humaneness, and ability to enjoy life despite social restrictions and persecution. It is obvious, also, that Cullen admired his Constancia: she outshines Mattie and Sam so outrageously that the reader is left wishing that Cullen had written two books instead of one.

The desire to portray all strata of Harlem social classes weakens the book because the characterizations never achieve full dimensions. The failure to present Harlem in depth is a pity, for one is struck by Cullen's facility with language in his descriptive or narrative passages. His dialogue is natural, too, even though it seems forced in some of the scenes with Constancia. On a deeper level, Cullen demonstrates an awareness of the uses of symbol and metaphor, and he displays a feeling for the sort of literary complexity absent in some of the other Harlem Renaissance novels.

The symbols of the razor and cards, pervasive throughout the book, are manifestations of the evil that Sam professes to have abandoned. The salvation theme is also developed through the symbols of cards and razor and concurrently through the use of dark and light imagery and colors. For instance, red has the dual symbolism of salvation and sin (e.g., the "blood of the Lamb" and red lips). In the case of the red kimona that Sam offers Mattie, the color reflects the shame Mattie shares in joining with Sam, the overt sinner. White functions in the traditional mode to symbolize purity, but black is employed to epitomize beauty instead of dark deeds and foul acts.

Like the razor, Sam, too, is an instrument: he is an instrument of salvation. Heaven has sent Sam to Mattie and she reclaims him for this divine abode. Sam is an instrument of salvation because his final act is presented ultimately as an act of sacrifice rather than of pure chicanery. Without Sam's ruse Mattie would be doomed; she would be barred from the salvation she earnestly seeks.

If there is a single metaphor for Cullen's book it lies in the title: one way to get into heaven is through a type of personal salvation that results from well-meaning deception. Mattie is fooled by the pretense, the "trickster" act of Sam, but Sam, in a roundabout, theological sense, is possibly saved as well. He pretends to hear music and to see bright lights in order to convince Mattie that he has had a vision. Before he dies, "he could feel Mattie's hand tremble on his forehead. Aunt Mandy stood transfixed and mute. He knew that for them he was forever saved." Thus, with careful attention to the details of Sam's vision, Cullen brings to an orderly conclusion the chaos of troubled souls. The fact that Cullen begins and concludes his work with the lives of Sam and Mattie is evidence that they were meant to be the primary focus of Cullen's story. Therefore, Cullen should have concentrated on it. The novel would have been strengthened by greater attention to these confused, common folk, especially since it is their story that supplies the novel with its thematic title.

It was another poet, the most enduring and well-known survivor of the Harlem Renaissance, who wrote perhaps the most appealing and least controversial novel during the waning of the Renaissance. It was during his student days (in his mid-twenties, however) at Lincoln University that Langston Hughes started writing his first novel, *Not Without Laughter* (1930). Although the book was favorably reviewed, Hughes later expressed disappointment with his character portrayals. Here he was perhaps not the best judge, for his characterizations are one of the strengths of this frankly nostalgic novel. Despite weaknesses in the structure and an obvious simplicity in Hughes's interpretation of the lives he describes, the book was warmly applauded by some reviewers whose opinions are worth quoting:

It is written with understanding, tolerance and beauty,
it lays special claim to the attention of those who love
life and its mirroring in fiction.

It is significant because even where it fails, it fails
beautifully, and where it succeeds—namely, in its intimate
characterizations and in its local color and
charm—it succeeds where almost all others have
failed.

Its strength lies in this simplicity, in its author's
unflinching honesty, and in his ability to make the reader
feel very deeply the problems of his characters.

Even Martha Gruening, in her article berating the writers of the Harlem Renaissance, gives tribute to Hughes:

[It] is not only uniquely moving and lovely among
Negro novels but among books written about America.
It is affirmative in a sense in which no other book
by an American Negro is, for it is the story of a Negro
happily identified with his own group, who because
of his identification tells what is essentially,
despite the handicaps of poverty and prejudice, the
story of a happy childhood.

Hughes explains what he was attempting to do in *Not Without Laughter* in his autobiography:

> I wanted to write about a typical Negro family in the Middle West, about people like those I had known in Kansas. But I thought I had been a typical Negro boy. . . We [his family] were poor□but different. For purposes of the novel, however, I created around myself what seemed to me a family more typical of Negro life in Kansas than my own had been.

Reality through nostalgia was a primary concern, then; and to treat the novel as one with a complex theme and motive is to do the book an injustice.

The story centers on the life of Sandy as he grows up in a small town in Kansas (Stanton). His mother, Annjee, is married to a no-account, goodlooking mulatto named Jimboy. Annjee's mother, Aunt Hager, a version of the mammy prototype, says of him: "Who ever heard of a nigger named Jimboy, anyhow? Next place, I ain't never seen a yaller dude yet that meant a dark woman no good□ an' Annjee is dark!"

Sandy has two aunts, Tempy and Harriett. Tempy has risen in the world and has all the shallow veneer of the "nouveau bourgeois." In reality, she is unsure of herself, although she makes it clear how she is to be treated and, in receiving this phony respect, remains isolated from her warm-hearted, unpretentious family. Tempy and others in her "class" know how tenuous their role is, for they "were all people of standing in the darker world□ doctors, school-teachers, a dentist, a lawyer, a hairdresser. . . One's family as a topic of conversation, however, was not popular in high circles, for too many of Stanton's dark society folks had sprung from humble family trees and low black bottoms."

Sandy's other aunt, Harriett, epitomizes the uninhibited, sensuous, generous woman□the sort of person, as Hughes says, who never "soiled" her mind by too much thinking. She hates the stultifying atmosphere of her home because Aunt Hager is obsessed by religion and its sometime byproduct, sin. Harriett displays toward her mother an impatience that erupts in venomous verbal spats. At one point she tells Aunt Hager:

> I don't want to be respectable if I have to be stuck up and dicty like Tempy is. . . She's colored and I'm colored and I haven't seen her since before Easter. . . It's not being black that matters with her, though, it's being poor, and that's what we are, you and me and Annjee, working for white folks and washing clothes and going in back doors, and taking tips and insults. I'm tired of it, mama, I want to have a good time once in a while.

Later, she shouts this shocking statement to her mother: "Your old Jesus is white, I guess, that's why! He's white and stiff and don't like niggers!"

In the end it is Harriett (by this time a night club singer) who intercedes in Sandy's behalf to aid him in the first steps towards achieving both his and Aunt Hager's dream of completing his schooling. Sandy's mother is not enthusiastic about education for the boy; work that pays enough to keep one alive is all that she considers necessary. But Harriett, even though rejecting Aunt Hager's way of life for herself, reminds Annjee, "Why, Aunt Hager'd turn over in her grave if she heard you talking so calmly about Sandy leaving school□the way she wanted to make something out of this kid."

The fictional canvas is rich in characterization and in its portrayal of a racial milieu little known at that time in our social history. The style of Hughes's prose is unrestrained and casual, tinged at times with an air of nostalgia and naïveté. The book is weakened by its episodic structure and by its incomplete, faltering characterization of the protagonist, Sandy. The novel sometimes seems to be more a novel about Aunt Hager, for she overwhelms the imagination and is presented in full dimension. Still, Hughes dissected "the ways of black folk" with a skill that he, and others, underestimated. In choosing the mode of the realistic novel, in fusing it with the ambiance of the black folk tradition, Hughes wrote a book that is as charming as it is honest.

Source: Margaret Perry, "The Major Novels," in *Silence to the Drums: A Survey of the Literature of the Harlem Renaissance*, Greenwood Press, 1976, pp. 61-88.

Adaptations

In 1984, Francis Ford Coppola directed *The Cotton Club*, a movie starring Richard Gere, Diane Lane, and Gregory Hines, about the famous jazz nightclub in Harlem during the 1920s and 1930s. The film was distributed by Orion Pictures Corporation.

In 1937, Claude McKay's novel *Banjo* was made into the film *Big Fella*, distributed by British Lion Film Corporation.

The Langston Hughes short story "Cora Unashamed" was made into a television film of the same name in 2000, distributed by the Public Broadcasting Service.

Rhapsodies in Black: Music and Words from the Harlem Renaissance is a boxed set with four CDs featuring various artists of the period reading and performing their works and music. Langston Hughes, for example, reads his poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" and Duke Ellington performs "The Cotton Club Stomp." In addition, some contemporary artists participate in the recording: rapper Ice-T reads Claude McKay's poem "If We Must Die." The set was released in 2000 by Wea/Rhino.

Langston Hughes's first collection of poetry, *The Weary Blues*, is celebrated on a CD of the same name, featuring Hughes reciting his poetry and the legendary jazz musician Charles Mingus performing music that recreates the atmosphere of a Harlem blues club. The CD was originally released in 1958 and is available on the Uni/Verve label.

Topics for Further Study

Many of the period's prominent writers studied at Columbia University in New York City. Research the histories of Columbia University and other American universities during the first twenty years of the twentieth century. What were the policies of various institutions in terms of admitting black students? What were the choices for blacks who wished to attend college during the 1920s and earlier in the century? Present your findings in an essay.

Churches played a key role in the lives of many Harlemites. In addition to holding Sunday services, some churches, such as the Abyssinian Baptist Church, organized community centers, helped feed the poor, and operated homes for the elderly. Investigate the growth of churches in Harlem during the 1920s and 1930s and how many developed into influential and powerful organizations.

Many critics note that, while the Harlem Renaissance ended during the early 1930s, African-American writers did not stop producing work. Research the important black writers of the 1940s and 1950s, such as Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and Ralph Ellison. Acquaint yourself with themes these writers dealt with, their styles, and so on. Discuss in a short essay any similarities or differences you see between this literature and the literature of the Harlem Renaissance.

Some historians and critics have argued that the present time is another "renaissance" for black artists, entertainers, and writers, similar in a number of ways to the Harlem Renaissance. Consider the two periods and create a chart showing the similarities and differences between the two as regards politics, social institutions, major cities involved in the arts, and the artistic achievements themselves.

Compare and Contrast

1920s-1930s: Harlem is well known for its entertainment venues, including the Savoy Ballroom, the Cotton Club, and the Apollo Theater. National acts regularly play at these stages, including Louis Armstrong, Fats Waller, and Lionel Hampton.

Today: After closing in the 1970s because African-American acts had access to betterpaying venues, the Apollo is now a national historic landmark owned by a nonprofit organization that books such international stars as Luther Vandross, B. B. King, hip-hop artists, and unknown musical hopefuls seeking national exposure.

1920s-1930s: Claude McKay publishes his novel *Home to Harlem*, the first bestselling book in the United States written by an African American. Major New York publishing houses search for the next black writer who will satisfy the reading public's sudden interest in African- American voices.

Today: Popular black authors are no longer a novelty. Works by Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, and Henry Louis Gates Jr. regularly appear on the national lists of bestselling books.

1920s-1930s: Lynchings and racially motivated murders of blacks are not unusual. In 1920, an estimated thirty-three blacks are lynched; in 1930, an estimated twenty-four blacks die from lynchings.

Today: According to national hate crime statistics collected by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, three racially motivated murders of African Americans and 462 racially motivated aggravated assaults against African Americans occurred in the year 2000.

What Do I Read Next?

W. E. B. Du Bois was one of the black intellectuals involved in launching and encouraging the Harlem Renaissance. David L. Lewis's Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Du Bois, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868- 1919* (1994), provides readers with a highly detailed narrative of the great thinker and founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in the years preceding the Harlem Renaissance.

Black visual artists experienced an explosion in ideas and energy during the 1920s and 1930s similar to that experienced by writers. *Rhapsodies in Black: Art of the Harlem Renaissance* (1997) covers the accomplishments of African- American painters, sculptors, photographers, actors, and singers working during the period. The book, edited by Richard J. Powell and David A. Bailey, includes 150 color plates and 100 blackand- white drawings.

Starting in 1910, the NAACP published *The Crisis*, a popular magazine that was responsible for giving the up-and-coming writers of the Harlem Renaissance the exposure and experience they needed to develop their talents. *The Crisis Reader: Stories, Poetry, and Essays from the NAACP's "Crisis" Magazine* (1999), edited by Sondra Kathryn Wilson, is a collection of writings drawn from the publication primarily during the 1920s.

Marcus Garvey and his Universal Negro Improvement Association championed the rights of black Americans but believed that blacks would never achieve equality in a white-dominated country such as the United States. This controversial leader, whose philosophies launched the "back to Africa" movement in the early years of the century and affected the thinking of many black intellectuals and others during the Harlem Renaissance, is examined in the biography *Marcus Garvey* (1987), edited by Mary Lawler and Nathan Huggins.

George S. Schuyler was a black writer who lived during the Harlem Renaissance and took great pleasure in satirizing and lampooning many of its leaders, artists, and philosophies. Those who read his work in the 1920s and 1930s found him to be harsh and sometimes unfair but always interesting and readable. Critics writing during the 1960s and 1970s were less enthusiastic and condemned him as a reactionary conservative. Schuyler's 1931 novel about a black man who decides to use a formula that will make him white, *Black No More*, caused a sensation. It was reprinted in 1999.

Further Study

Bontemps, Arna, *The Harlem Renaissance Remembered*, Dodd, Mead, 1972.

This is a collection of essays by a writer and thinker who participated in the Harlem Renaissance. The second chapter provides a useful overview of the period.

Hughes, Langston, *The Big Sea*, Hill and Wang, 1993.

Hughes's autobiography was originally published in 1940. This is a reprint of his memories of his life as a poet in Harlem and as a cook and waiter in various Paris nightclubs during the 1920s.

Lewis, David L., *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, Alfred A. Knopf, 1981.

This book is a social history of Harlem in the 1920s, focusing on the literature and music produced during the era.

□, ed., *The Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader*, Penguin USA, 1995.

This collection includes essays, memoirs, drama, poetry, and fictional pieces from forty-five of the major and minor writers of the Harlem Renaissance.

Wintz, Cary D., *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance*, Rice University Press, 1988.

Wintz's book is an exploration of the Harlem Renaissance phenomenon in the context of black social and intellectual history in the United States, and it connects the Renaissance writers with the literary community as a whole.

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Washington, Michele Y., "Souls on Fire: The Artists of the Black Renaissance in the 1920s and '30s Defined a New Cultural Identity Reflecting Their African Roots," in *Print*, Vol. 52, No. 3, May-June 1998.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Literary Movements for Students (LMfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, LMfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on

□classic□ novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of LMfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of LMfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in LMfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by LMfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

LMfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Literary Movements for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LMfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LMfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Literary Movements for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Literary Movements for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from LMfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Literary Movements for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from LMfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Literary Movements for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of LMfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Literary Movements for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of LMfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Literary Movements for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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