

“If We Must Die”: Writing the African American Double Battle in WWI

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Abstract: *Not Only War: The Story of Two Great Conflicts*, the only WWI African American novel written by a veteran remained a forgotten and neglected text for a long time. Contemporary critics either ignored it or found it lacking as good fiction. But its recent re-edition in 2010 has brought it to the attention of new generations of readers and critics, filling a gap in a space that had hitherto been exclusively represented by the post-war literary renditions of the experience of the returning soldier. This article discusses its import in the context of African American combat literature as both fiction and a memoir that stands as a reminder of the cycle of promise and disappointment that turned the war experience into a powerful catalyst for both the literary and artistic articulations of the Harlem Renaissance and the early civil rights movement.

Keywords: War Literature, African Americans, Victor Daly, W.E.B. Du Bois, Harlem Renaissance, Lynching

*We were sent to training camp, then overseas –
And me and my brother were happy as you please
Thinking we were fighting for Democracy’s true reign
And that our dark blood would wipe away the stain
Of prejudice, and hate, and the false color line –
And give us the rights that are yours and mine.
They told us America would know no black or white
So we marched to the front, happy to fight.*

Langston Hughes, *The Colored Soldier*, 1919

African Americans were not the only non-white soldiers to fight in the European theatre in World War I – France, for example, mobilized a large contingent of North Africans, mostly Berbers, and at least a quarter of a million Africans from Senegal and the Sudan, as well as a smaller number of men from the French West Indies (Dean: 2010:44:45). Britain, on the other hand, refrained from using non-white troops in European battlefields; their colonial regiments were mostly used in Turkey, in the Dardanelles campaign of 1917, in the Middle East and in Africa, namely in the Cameroon. Both countries implemented different policies of military management with respect to the non-white troops. Britain, in accordance with its 1914 Manual of Military Law that specifically excluded black or mixed-race soldiers from exerting any command (though they could be authorized to hold an honorary rank), rarely commissioned non-white soldiers, with rare exceptions such as in the famous case of the footballer Walter Tull.¹ France, on the other hand, though occasionally accused of providing its colonial troops with equipment and training below the general standard, had in its ranks a substantial number of non-white officers in positions of high command, including at least two generals (Barbeau/Henri 1974: 17-19).

While these colonial soldiers may have shared some of the experiences of dislocation and racial discrimination with the black soldiers of the American Expeditionary Force, the political and cultural significance of the experience of the 400,000 African American troops, volunteers and draftees, had specific and particularized contours, shaped by the unique expectations they brought to the fight. Encouraged by their civic leaders, these soldiers saw the wearing of the uniform as a symbolic promise of equal citizenship, a guarantee of an inevitable wave of change grounded in the visibility of their courage and patriotism. Their hopes would be brutally defrauded, both during and after the war, when the returning veterans discovered that after having, as the writer Jessie Fauset famously asserted, “fought a double battle, one with Germany and one with white America” (Fauset 1924: 269), none of the promises of citizenship would be granted without further strife. Nevertheless, the war experience had a deep cultural impact, affording thousands of young men what Whalan has called “the political leverage of cosmopolitanism” (2011: 284),

fermented by the encounters with a white French population that saw them as people worthy of respect, recalibrating a self-assertion of Blackness that could not be contained within the old domestic parameters of racial segregation.

This article discusses how these parallel articulations of betrayal and self-confidence are aesthetically expressed in the war literature written by African Americans, namely in *Not only War: The Story of Two Great Conflicts*, written in 1932 by Victor Daily, the only WWI novel authored by an African American veteran. It will read its multivalence as a personal account, a work of literature and a historical document, highlighting the inherently political significance in the American early twentieth century of the black body in a US uniform both as an assertion of citizenship and a reconfiguration of a self-assured Black masculinity. The criteria invested in the choice of this text, rather than in the better known novels featuring veterans where war has a spectral presence, namely Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem*, Walter White's *The Fire in the Flint* or Jessie Fauset's *There is Confusion*, depends on a web of implications grounded on a definition of war literature that gives primacy to the direct and embodied experience of the patterns of combat.

Writing the Inexpressible

In the introduction to the monumental 2012 three-volume collection *Literature and War*, Kate McLaughlin describes war writing as "a literature of paradoxes", "continuously commenting on its own failure" as writers often register their "incapacity to convey the realities of armed combat" (McLaughlin 2012: xi), betrayed by the failure of language and by the perceived experiential barrier that sets their kind of knowledge apart from that of their readers as "war, to a greater extent than other subjects (...) requires personal experience" (ibid xiii). Implied in these considerations is a definition of war literature that implies direct contact with either combat or with its immediate consequences, generating a type of knowledge so specific and so embodied that it rarely can be conveyed to those who have not shared it. For Eric Leed, this "non-verbal, concrete multichannel" experience is acquired by the body, learned through the "physical immersion in the dramatic structure of physical events" (Leeds 1981: 74). The "disjunctive" knowledge thus attained sets those

who acquired it apart from those who “stood outside of it”, but also segments one’s identity, dividing it into a “before” and “after” that can “only with difficulty be integrated into a continuous self” (*idem*: 75).

Centuries of literary evidence demonstrate that war does not silence its participants and victims and that the gulf of disjunctive isolation that separates them from all others who cannot imagine the brutality of what they know is not an unbreachable gap. As McLaughlin points out, “destruction creates” and if war literature is at times “voyeuristic, exploitative, and sadistic”, celebrating violence and falling into the traps of propaganda or unconsidered patriotism, it is also frequently “tender, selfless and comforting” (*idem*: xi), striving to “represent the unrepresentable” in powerful exercises of catharsis and self-reflection.

Recognizing and prioritizing the uniqueness of the experience of combat creates some major interrogations in the definition of a corpus. The first implication of the “experience precondition” is to complicate the more flexible and open-ended definitions of war literature that accept a wide variety of authorship positions and themes within the broad genre. Peter Aichinger, in *The American Soldier in Fiction*, argues that the genre should include more than combat narratives and embrace any work of fiction “in which the lives and actions of the characters are principally affected by warfare or the military establishment” (x). Aichinger, for example, qualifies as war literature E. E. Cummings’ *The Enormous Room*, an autobiographical account of his temporary detention by French authorities on suspicion of antiwar sentiments in which all the main characters are civilians, but rejects Carson McCullers’ *Reflection in a Golden Eye*, although all its main characters are in the military and the plot takes place in an army base. The reason is that in the first, war is the primordial driving force of the plot, while in the second the army structures only provide a social setting to a plot that could have developed elsewhere. (Aichinger 1975: x). Such maximalist definitions seem too capacious at times, detaching war writing from knowledge of war, but they cannot be dismissed outright, especially considering that the experience precondition, besides pointing to a quasi-naturalistic bias, excludes much of what is written in times of war; as McLaughlin stresses, “confining the

right to write about war to combatants [...] has the result that those traditionally denied access to the war zone" are also denied access to the genre" (*idem*: xiii), as has long been the case of women and of minorities deprived of the right to a visible presence in that space of construction of national myths. This is the case of African Americans who, though present in major military conflicts before WWI, were frequently erased from their historical memory, and who have frequently used the battlefield as a metaphor for claiming national belonging in narratives which consistently echo preoccupations and themes that go beyond those invoked by much of the mainstream literature of combat, as Jennifer James argues in *A Freedom Bought with Blood*, a major study of African American war literature.

Positioning African American writing in the larger American WWI corpus might clarify some points of dissonance; Quinn (2009) identifies four specific trends in this sometimes minor literary corpus: the early anti-German and atrocity theme emerges in texts that explore the media-driven narrative of the Prussian responsibility for the war and probe the presumed mistreatment of European civilians; emerging after the declaration of war, the enemy-within trope questions or reaffirms the loyalty of German Americans, while the patriotic or sacrifice text, mostly written by non-combatants, justifies politically or socially the American participation in the European conflict; after the cessation of combat, the anti-war or disillusionment novel of a much higher quality and more complex texture, frequently written by veterans, re-examines the combat experience and critically queries the war's aims². In contrast, the African American corpus of WWI literature is almost exclusively affiliated with the last trope, as writers gazed back at the hopes brought to the fight, which had as much to do with the claim of citizenship through military service as with the general claims of the defence of democracy.

Reclaiming Duty, Asserting Belonging

When Crispus Attucks, a fugitive slave, took part in the historical Boston Massacre of 1770 and lost his life along with other rebellious Patriots, his symbolic presence in this pivotal moment in the emerging narrative of nationhood has imprinted in it a claim of belonging and citizenship that would be an object of contention in all the military conflicts

that followed. During the War of Independence, for example, although at least 5,000 black men, both slaves and free, had joined the local and colonial militias fighting the British, the Continental Congress in charge of putting together a coherent and coordinated fighting force would bow to the demands of the southern colonies that rejected the participation of black fighters in their ranks, and in 1775 a decree was issued stating that from then on no recruiting officer would be allowed to enlist “Negroes, Boys unable to bear Arms nor Old Men unfit to endure the Fatigues of the Campaign” (Quarles 1996:15), thus effectively reducing blackness to a condition of unfitness. Protests from the formerly enlisted free black men led General Washington to Congress to change its position, and fearing that some of these able fighting men would change their loyalties and join the British Army, Congress admitted back to the ranks those free men who had already been enlisted, but kept the prohibition of further enlistment (Alt 2002: 18). During the Civil War, the first African American fighting units in the Union Army, something long urged for by black leaders and abolitionists, could only be recruited after the passing of the Emancipation Proclamation, against a backdrop of military and political opposition, grounded on the objections summed up in an editorial published in 1863 in the New York Times: (1) “Negroes would not fight” as they may lack “courage, steadiness [...] and other qualities essential to good soldiership”; (2) whites will not fight with them and “our own citizens will not enlist, or will quit the service if compelled to fight on their side”; (3) not enough would enlist anyway, and (4) the “use of negroes would exasperate the South.” (New York Times 1863:3). Although running the risk of not being considered prisoners of war if they were caught by Confederate troops³ (which might mean automatic sale into slavery), many volunteered and the performance of the First South Carolina Volunteer Regiment, composed entirely of escaped slaves, and the famous 54th Massachusetts Volunteers Regiment under the command of abolitionist Colonel Robert Gould Shaw clarified, at least temporarily, all the doubts expressed by the New York Times about the soldiering qualities of African Americans.

This pattern, established in the early days of the nation, whereby black Americans had to, as it were, fight for the right to fight, imprinted a symbolic reading on the black body in a uniform, turning, as James points out, “the military into a site of rehabilitation” (2007:

15) and mobilizing the representation of the "black male soldier-citizen" as a strategic trope in the assertion of citizenship and national belonging. This, in turn, gives rise to a "genre of fictional war writing specific to African Americans: the black masculinist war novel" (*idem*: 19) shaped by the need to idealize the black man in uniform as a metonymy of the cultural and political aims of a collective identity formation.

Not only War: The Story of Two Great Conflicts fits the specificities of this literary trope. Dedicated to former veterans Daly describes as "the Army of the Disillusioned", it takes the reader from the fight for enlistment to the fight in the fields of France, neatly dividing the narrative arc into two separate parts dedicated to each experience but united by a protagonist, Montgomery Jason, a southern university student who, like Daly himself, initially embraces the promises of participation in the conflict as a step in the direction of full civic and political emancipation.

The political rhetoric of civil rights leaders like W.E.B. Du Bois encouraged the participation of African Americans in the war effort, hoping this ultimate act of self-sacrifice and patriotism would dissolve the worst effects of the colour line and encourage a new sense of entitlement. In a series of editorials published in *The Crisis*, the official organ of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, in 1917 and 1918, Du Bois moved from an exhortation to cleanse America's racial sins, alerting people to the incompatibility between fighting for freedom and allowing the barbarity of unpunished lynchings (Du Bois 1917), to an appeal for the enlistment of young black men, urging them to "forget our special grievances and close our ranks shoulder to shoulder with our own white fellow citizens and the allied nations that are fighting for democracy despite our deep sympathy with the reasonable and deep-seated feeling of revolt among Negroes at the present insult and discrimination" since "that which the German power represents today spells death to the aspirations of Negroes and all darker races for equality, freedom and democracy" (Du Bois 1918).

This appeal was not universally welcomed and influential leaders and segments of the African American press would denounce it as naïve: the *Washington Bee*, a newspaper edited by the African-American lawyer and journalist William Calvin Chase, argued in an

editorial of 1917 that “self-styled spokesmen for the black people had no right to offer the services of Negroes to the government” (apud Barbeau 1974: 12) and the radical socialist newspaper *The Messenger*⁴ suggested that “these flag-waving leaders should volunteer to go to France, if they are so eager to make the world safe for Democracy,” adding that “we would rather make Georgia safe for the Negro.” (Messenger 1917: 31). The recognition that “forgetting one’s grievances” would not come naturally to most informed young black men encouraged some writers in Du Bois’ circles to use literature to serve the political aims of emancipation through military service. The best example is probably a one-act play, *Mine Eyes Have Seen*, by Alice Dunbar-Nelson, published in *The Crisis* in April 1918, which staged the dilemma of a young draftee contemplating asking for exemption from service as he is the single breadwinner for a dependent family against the advice of a multi-ethnic cast of friends who urge him to do the selfless thing: “Your race is calling you,” one of them claims, “to carry on its good name”, equating doing one’s duty by the nation with honouring one’s identity and community (Dunbar-Nelson 1918: np).

If a minority of African Americans had to be actively convinced that fighting in Europe entailed the promise asserted by Du Bois when he claimed that “this war is an End and also a Beginning” and that “never again will darker people of the world occupy the place they had before” (Du Bois 1918a: 60), the political establishment and the military structures of the nation regarded this impulse to enlist with extreme ambivalence. On the one hand, universal military service would inject a considerable new range of human resources into the American ranks but, on the other hand, as always, blacks in uniform were viewed with deep suspicion, especially in the South, where the idea of turning hitherto relatively compliant and violently subjugated labourers into soldiers caused a deep-seated panic about post-war civil rights militancy. As Senator James K. Vardaman, a Democrat from Mississippi, would claim: “universal military service means that millions of Negroes who come under this measure will be armed. I know of no greater menace to the South than this.”⁵ Nevertheless, the draft law passed in 1917 required the registration of all male citizens between the ages of 21 and 31 and more than 2 million African American men were registered by the draft boards, although in total only 400,000 were actually drafted in a

military force of 4 million (Nalty 1986: 112) Controversies about how they should be trained and deployed and who should command them immediately exposed how the military establishment was inclined to replicate the racial practices of the South. At first, the very idea of commissioning black officers was summarily dismissed. The men were placed under the command of Southern officers, who purportedly had "experience" in dealing with men who, being considered unreliable in combat situations before they ever had a chance to prove themselves, frequently received minimal combat training and were mostly deployed as labour units destined to do the manual labour that the army euphemistically called *Services of Supply*; more than 70 per cent of the African Americans urged to enlist to fight for freedom found themselves restricted to building camps, loading and unloading ships and doing other menial jobs, while being kept out of the two segregated fighting units (the 92nd and the 93rd infantry divisions), a demeaning experience invoked by McKay in *Home to Harlem*.

Pressure to promote a number of black officers out of the ranks of the many middle-class university-trained men, who would in any other circumstances be considered as officer material, generated a parallel problem as none of the fourteen Officer Camps in operation were open to black candidates. Under pressure from African American leaders, Congress finally authorized the establishment of the segregated Des Moines Officer Training Camp to train black officers, a decision that was met with hope and trepidation, and which created a trope that African American literature would celebrate, deconstruct and scrutinize for decades to come.

In spite of the caveats incorporated in the decision - for example, stipulating that no more than 2 per cent of officer candidates would be black men, or that they would never be able to rise above the rank of colonel (and, needless to say, that they would never be in a situation to give orders to white soldiers) - university students from Howard University, the most prestigious of all African American higher education institutions, toured the country going from college to college, soliciting applications for Des Moines. The enthusiasm would be short-lived and the OTC would be closed during the war, but its existence explains how Monty Jason could be written as a member of a combat unit, the 367th Infantry Regiment,

popularly known as the Buffaloes, sailing to France in the summer of 1918.

Writing Black Masculinity in Uniform

Not Only War, which as mentioned above is spatially organized in two geographies - Spartanburg, Virginia, and Northern France - creates a continuum across the two settings through the exposure of the mechanisms to control inter-racial relations, especially those that infringe the sexual prohibitions of the American South.

The novel introduces the parallel trajectories of two young Southerners who will enlist in the American Expeditionary Force – Robert Lee Casper, son of a powerful planting family, whose values are those of a “true Southerner” as he “believed in the Baptist Church, the supremacy of the white race and the righteousness of the Democratic Party”(12), functions as a stock antagonist to Montgomery Jason, the idealistic and idealized African-American university student who, as James points out, fulfils the part of the exemplary counter-stereotypical representative of all American Blackness. At the onset of the narrative both men are engaged with the prospect of war, but it is significant that while Robert, getting ready to enter Officer Training Camp, automatically assumes he will be appointed to the position of military leadership that is his by birthright, Monty is waiting for the promise of a similar opportunity in the shape of the promised but long delayed Des Moines OTC. Significantly, he is first encountered involved in a disagreement with his college room-mate, Roscoe Simms, about the call to join what his friend calls “a white man’s war”. This debate re-enacts the opposition of some minority sectors of the African American intelligentsia to the position of the civil rights establishment of the time, but performs two parallel functions: to illustrate the premises of the “liberation through visible patriotism” political platform and to assert the stasis entailed in its opposition. Monty’s hopeful assertion that “if we roll up our sleeves and plunge into this thing (...) the Government will reward the race for its loyalty” is in fact deconstructed by Roscoe’s curt comment that “the loyalty of a slave to its master is a vice” and his claim that “no amount of sacrifice on your part or my part, will ever soften the hearts of these crackers towards us. You’re just condemned to ride in a Jim Crow car for the rest of your life.”(12). This sarcasm is

immediately problematized by his lack of alternatives. When Monty asks his friend "Well, what's your program?" he admits he has no plan beyond his own sphere of interests (finishing his medical studies and setting up a practice), highlighting the diminished choices of young, civic-minded, middle-class, African American men.

Having established for the reader the depth of expectations carried by the wearing of a US uniform for thousands of young African Americans like Monty, the text quickly contrasts this optimism with the harsh realities of the colour line through the tropes of inter-racial sexual protocols and prohibitions.

These first emerge in the United States as both Monty and Robert find themselves competing for the attention of the same young woman, Miriam Pinckerney, a bi-racial school teacher shaped by an enlightened Northern education. The way Robert meets Miriam is an exemplary illustration of the sense of entitlement that shapes the character. Late catching a train, he is offered a ride by Miriam and a friend, and his calculations reflect how much social conventions and his power to stand above them are played out: "What! Ride to the Junction besides two niggers! Well, I'd rather miss a dozen trains [...] Still she's damned good looking – and neat and clean too. But what would folks think seeing me driving down the station with two nigger girls" (10). The fact that he accepts the ride, and seeks her out in the "colored coach" to "say a few words", thereby violating the segregation laws that he admits "have no sense" if and when they stand in the way of his desire, iterate his sense of having the right to occasionally ignore the laws he usually supports, imposing himself in the black private sphere in ways that could never be emulated by a black man in a parallel situation.

If the subplot of relation between Robert and Miriam invokes the traditional melodramatic motif of the tragic mulatto misused by a white predator, it is worth pointing out how it reinvents and upturns it; self-confident Miriam is anything but tragic. In fact she uses her seductiveness for her own pragmatic purposes and chooses Robert over Monty because she needs his help to secure a teaching position in a school district where appointments are controlled by his father. Unchaste and unexemplary of the idealized black femininity, she is also fully aware that "the situation was fraught with danger" as "southern

white men (...) could only seek friendship with comely colored girls for one purpose – a social equality that existed after dark.”(26)

But even after dark all bodies were not subject to the same sexual regime; the episode points directly to the protocols of sexual racism in the south that tolerated contact between white men and black women in conditions of dependence and subalternization, always common within the master/slave sexual economy, while absolutely prohibiting any friendly contact between black men and white women. These, no matter how innocent, were automatically interpreted as instances of sexual molestation, and were frequently punished extra-judiciously by the barbarity of public lynchings. In fact, in 1917, as hundreds of thousands of young African American men were getting ready to fight “the white man’s war”, back home at least 70 cases of public lynchings were documented. In France, Lieutenant Robert Casper and Private Monty Jason, rejected by Des Moines due to his youth, will play out their parallel but opposed performances of masculinity under the stress of combat and the challenges of different protocols of inter-racial relations.

Zones Interdites

Critics of war literature like Jennifer James and Mark Whalam have frequently pointed out how it privileges homosociality, a kind of inevitable bonding between men under terrible stress and interdependence, united by their common vulnerability. In the case of African American literature, “interracial homosociality does signify political integration” (James 2007: 176), in “fictional epiphanies” that expose “the deeper bonds holding black and white American soldiers together” especially “in the desegregated space of no man’s land” that becomes “a space of moral revelation” (Whalan 2008: xiii), as the circumstances of combat tend to reduce social constructs to the bare bones of the suffering human body. In *Not Only War*, as Monty’s unit progresses through the frontlines under fire, a similar process of radical simplification of the human condition is enacted, represented by the de-racialized and destroyed components of the suffering body: “A burst of bullet carried off a leg. A sudden hail of lead punctuated a chest. A single bullet hurried on its way through a jaw out by way of the temple. A heart was shattered. But the line pushed on” (46). Under

threat of death, vulnerability unites: "They huddled together, the black man and the white, each seeking the protection of the other body" (43).

This extreme deconstruction of all that is culturally contingent is pitted, in the French theatre, against the constructs and protocols of racial segregation brought from home and threatened by the different sensibilities of a country untouched by American prejudices in a tension that shapes the second part of the novella.

In Northern France, where both Robert and Monty are posted, the French military authorities under whose command many would serve⁶ and the civilian population were not sufficiently trained in the protocols of American inter-racial codes, and the fear of exposure of the young African American soldiers to a healthy camaraderie with their French counterparts, or worse, to contact with curious open-minded French women, pushed the military authorities to establish lists of interdictions they hoped their hosts would follow.

An infamous memo emanating from the headquarters of the American Expeditionary Force entitled "Secret Information concerning the Black American Troops", distributed to middle-ranking French officers likely to come into contact with African American soldiers and to civilian authorities of towns where they would be stationed (and energetically denounced by the French National Assembly in June 1919), instructed the French that as "the increasing number of Negroes in the United States would create for the white race in the Republic a menace of degeneracy were it not that an impassable gulf has been made between them", a number of interdictions, unfamiliar to the French, who not facing the same danger had "become accustomed to treating the Negro with familiarity and indulgence" are sternly suggested. Among these *zones interdites* of interracial contact is the recommendation not to "eat with them, not to shake hands or seek to talk or meet with them outside of the requirements of military service", not to "commend them in the presence of white Americans" and especially to not allow intimacy between white French women and black soldiers, a practice seen by other American soldiers as a "menace to the prestige of the white race" (French Directive 1919).

A parallel between Robert's casual violation of segregationist interdictions in his pursuit of Miriam in the United States and a reverse potential intimacy between Monty and

a white French woman is used to expose the ambiguities of the “brotherhood under fire” narrative strategy. Promoted to the rank of sergeant due to his bravery in combat, Monty is erroneously billeted by his Company commander in a French civilian house where he meets for the first time an inquisitive and open-minded white woman, Blanche Aubertin, the family’s daughter.

In spite of his deliberate self-protective avoidance of any close contact with the white woman, eventually Monty establishes with her a friendly connection that is devoid of any sexual dimension – basically, he teaches her English and she asks him questions about America under the vigilant eye of her mother. This violation of a *zone interdite*, unimaginable in his southern home, seems to restore to Monty a sense of self-assured, unpoliced masculinity. When Robert Casper, visiting the same house, finds the young sergeant playing the piano with Blanche and charges him with “socializing with white women”, the Monty that denounces with calm anger his “dirty southern prejudice” had discovered, like the thousands of non-fictional young African American soldiers who fought in France, a self-assured voice and a new awareness of their worth, confirmed by the respect and friendliness reflected in the gaze of their French comrades and of the local people who treated them no differently from any other troops fighting to protect them.

After his breach of the codes of interracial mixing is punished in court martial proceedings that strip Monty of his rank, his bitterness is tinged with a degree of self-reflexive awareness that contrasts with his early naïve beliefs in the political righteousness of the war: “make the world safe for democracy – war to end war – self determination of the oppressed people” he muses as he considers the old slogans, “but they didn’t mean black people. Oh no. black people don’t count. They are not even fit to be officers in their own regiment – not even non-commissioned officers if they are going to be friendly with white girls” (61).

Concluding that “fellows like Casper would never change” (63), determined to resent him forever due to his active role in his persecution, Monty is challenged again by the same pull of “oneness” that he had experienced in combat when he encounters the severely wounded Robert lying alone on the battlefield. As the arrogant and racist Robert becomes a

vulnerable suffering body, losing everything but his despair and his pain, Monty does the only thing that is possible, being the man he is now sure he is – he risks his life attempting to save Robert. They both die, and they are found “face downward, their arms about each other, side by side” (70) dying in the way they could and should have lived.

Having died a hero, Monty does not have to face the challenges of confronting the domestic racial segregation that the veterans re-encountered when they returned home, armed with a recalibrated self-confident Black masculinity, fostered by their liberating cosmopolitan experience that could not be contained within the old parameters. *Not Only War* is, nevertheless, a fundamental document to understand the pride and self-awareness that was met with such extreme racial violence in the Red Summer of 1919, when countless returning veterans were lynched wearing their uniform because that symbol of patriotism and sacrifice was now read in the South as a symbol of the possibility of equality worn by men who could no longer accept what they had accepted before. As Dray documents, of the 76 lynchings that took place in 1919 many happened in circumstances similar to that of Wilbur Little who returned to Georgia proudly wearing his uniform, only to be beaten up at the train depot by a gang of whites and warned never to dare use that uniform again. A few days later he walked down the street wearing it and was lynched as a consequence (Dray 2002: 248)

In an editorial of 1919, Du Bois, reflecting on his own sense of betrayal and commenting on the lynching surge would assert that “We return, We Return from Fighting. We Return Fighting” (Du Bois 1919). The lynching of the proud returning soldier would become a motif in African American literature, from poetry to drama, as the war experience would prove to be a powerful catalyst for both the literary and artistic articulations of the Harlem Renaissance and the early civil rights movement. But it is perhaps Claude Mackay’s angry protest poem written that summer that better speaks to and for those soldiers who had changed in the fields of Northern France:

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,

Making their mock at our accursed lot.
If we must die, O let us nobly die
(...)
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

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NOTES

¹ Walter Tull, born in Kent, was the son of a Barbadian father and a white English mother. Already a famous football player when WWI started, he served in the Footballers' Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment, and also in the 5th Battalion. After fighting in the Battle of the Somme in 1916, he was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant, thus becoming the first non-white officer in the British Army. He was killed in combat in France in 1918 (Vasili, 2004)

² For Quinn, examples of the first trend might be found in texts like Owen Wister's 1915 *The Pentecost of Calamity* and in Frances Wilson Huard's 1916 *My Home in the Field of Honor*; the enemy within the trope emerges in novels such as Mary Roberts Rinehart's *Dangerous Days*, from 1919, and *The Son Decides: The Story of a Young German-American* by Arthur Stanwood Pier, and in the third category, novels such as Edith Wharton's *The Marne* (1918) or Irving Bacheller's *The Prodigal Village* are suggested as paradigmatic. The corpus of post-war disenchanted literature is much more established, ranging from John dos Passos's 1921 *Three Soldiers* or Thomas Boyd's *Through the Wheat* to Faulkner's *Soldiers Pay* (1926), Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) and the powerful antiwar *Company K* published in 1933 by William March.

³ The Confederate Congress authorized President Jefferson Davis to put to death by hanging any white officer of a Negro regiment captured by the southern troops and to deal with the enlisted black soldiers according to the laws of the Southern States, which might mean either enslavement or death.

⁴ *The Messenger*, edited by A. Philip Randolph and Charles Owen was, at the time, considered by the Department of Justice to be the most "dangerous" of all black publications. For their position against the war, the editors spent some time in jail for allegedly pro-German writings. In this the Messenger was not unique. *The Masses*, a socialist/anarchist/pacifist white magazine edited by Max Eastman was also indicted for conspiring to obstruct conscription.

⁵ Vardaman, James K. "The Great American Race Problem and its relation to War. Pamphlet", np. (1917) 7-8 apud Barbeau/Henri (31)

⁶ Two Black infantry divisions were sent to France – the 92nd and the 93rd. A substantial number of Infantry regiments of the latter, including the famous Harlem Hellfighters (369th Infantry), were assigned to the French Army under the command of French officers.