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English Honors

Class [REDACTED]

Mr. Ruppel

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**Honors Comparative Essay - The Sun Also Rises/The Remains of the Day**

The Interwar Period in Europe was truly a time of dashed hopes - the deaths of ten million and twice that number wounded shook the core of European society. Perceptions on culture, class, religion, and honor were permanently shattered, and a generation was lost with no guidance on how to pick up the pieces. In Ernest Hemingway's **The Sun Also Rises** and Kazuo Ishiguro's **The Remains of the Day**, the reader gains two unique perspectives on the period and after: the first being the perspective of morally debased expats, the other of upper-class life through the lens of a butler and his lord in the United Kingdom. Whilst these two perspectives share massive difference, many would consider that as both lived through the Great War, they would have similar behavior, but in actuality, we see many unique identities, exhibited by characters or gatherings of characters in both stories. The tiniest details show the greatest change - and whether intentionally or not, each character in each of the books exhibits something unique about the generation. Thus, the "Lost Generation" is indeed a catch-all; very few characters embody all traits and instead possess one as a major character trait. This shows that while the times reflect on the people, the people also reflect on the times, and the reader can truly appreciate how changing the Interwar period was for all classes. The intent of this essay is to

show that group identities are shaped by the big events, but also how the big events happen are also shaped by said identities.

There is no greater indicator of this character change in *The Lost Generation* than **The Sun Also Rises**, taking place in 1924. The characters in the book are all damaged in some form, an allegory of the issues facing the Lost Generation after the war. The major characters are American and British expatriates living in Paris due to the cheap cost at the time - indeed, the city of Paris itself can be seen as a character in terms of how much of a shadow of its reputation it was. These characters meander around aimlessly - no goal in sight and no pressing motivation except to find the nearest drink. Each of the characters reflects some sort of flawed character trait, and in comparison to the Count Mippipopolous, who is an allegory for pre-War Europe in terms of his attitude and character, is lacking in something. Jake Barnes, the main character of the book and the narrator, for example, was wounded in the war - it is strongly implied that as a result of this injury he is impotent, and thus his masculinity is always in question, leading him to lash out and also at the same time try to find solace in others. Other characters engage in drinking, casual sex, or fall into rampant depression while scorning things treasured in pre-War Europe such as religion, military service, or stable relationships. In the earlier flashbacks of **The Remains of the Day**, taking place in the early 1920's, only one character participated in the war and its aftermath: Lord Darlington, who was the main character's former master. He seems not to truly care about the aftermath of the war, as noted by his butler with the following quote: "As I recall, he had not been initially so preoccupied with the peace treaty when it was drawn up at the end of the Great War, and I think it is fair to say that his interest was prompted not so much by an

analysis of the treaty, but by his friendship with Herr Karl-Heinz Bremann.” (The Remains of the Day) He was only spurred into action with the suicide of the said friend, in which he set out to correct the “injustices” of the Treaty of Versailles. The actions he does are in the name of providing humanitarian relief to Germany, believing them to be too punished by the war and England’s conduct unbecoming of proper honor for a defeated foe, showing his belief in the system of honor pre-War Europe so greatly treasured. However, in the later parts of the book, we can see these sentiments warped - Lord Darlington becomes sympathetic to the various fascist movements taking Europe by storm in the 30’s. This can be explained with the following quote and its context: “‘He was my enemy.’ he was saying, 'but he always behaved like a gentleman. We treated each other decently over six months of shelling each other. He was a gentleman doing his job and I bore him no malice. I said to him: "Look here, we're enemies now and I'll fight you with all I've got. But when this wretched business is over, we shan't have to be enemies anymore and we'll have a drink together." Wretched thing is, this treaty is making a liar out of me. I mean to say, I told him we wouldn't be enemies once it was all over. But how can I look him in the face and tell him that's turned out to be true?'” (The Remains of the Day) This passage is Lord Darlington speaking to the Butler just after the end of the first World War. The person he is talking about is Herr Bremann, the German friend whose death spurred him into action. This quote shows the standards of nobility Lord Darlington conducted himself with - a nobility that was shattered by England and the other Allied nations acting unjustly towards Germany, and also gives a glimpse into the future for how he becomes vulnerable to Nazi propaganda: Because he feels England has been unfair to Germany in the aftermath of World War I, he continues to give Germany the benefit of the doubt, and views attempts at silencing their influence as more

unfairness on behalf of the Allies. Darlington is the character to measure the influence time has on people - in the twelve-year gap between the first flashbacks to the second flashbacks, Darlington's view has been so warped by the very standards of nobility which he clung to while the rest of the world willfully abandoned them, and as his morals aged, he found that there was no close identification with them anymore. As soon as a return to the traditional order presented itself in the form of the Nazi Party, he sympathized with them - showing the impact time can have on views. Indeed, time heals no wounds for Darlington, and only provided another channel for them to bleed through.

Time is not the only factor in the way group identities are shaped by big events - just like an earthquake, someone living in the epicenter of an event shall have a much different reaction and change than someone living on the outskirts or even outside the radius. The society that is seen in **The Sun Also Rises** may be more damaged because of its location in comparison to the one seen in **The Remains of the Day**. The war took place in continental Europe, and France had a much closer and stronger loss than the United Kingdom did (*The World at War*). Likewise, another perspective can be seen entirely; during the events of **The Sun Also Rises**, the characters travel to Spain, where they meet a young and impressionable character by the name of Pedro Romero, who is a Spanish bullfighter. In him many of the characters find a real purpose in life - and due to his age, he is the "future" which would have a better life than the Lost Generation did. Spain participated in neither of the World Wars, although soon after **The Sun Also Rises** was written, it would fall into a brutal civil war. Of course, the characters would not know this and viewed Pedro Romero with almost an awe. He found the great purpose in life that they were all lacking, one that has deluded nearly an entire generation. One could venture a guess that all of

Romero's friends also are not affected by the war in the way that Jake and his friends were.

Likewise, we can see this group mentality in **The Remains of the Day**, and how the butler continuously uses butler-terminology to get his point across, seemingly unaware of an outside life or those who would not know such terms.

One final thing to mention is the context each character has that the reader does not - just as casually as someone would refer to "the war" and take it to mean the War on Terror, so too are the characters in the book almost never directly mentioning events such as the actual World Wars or the things that precipitated them, since they have this prior context. In fact, the only time the war is ever explicitly mentioned is when Jake brushes off the advances of a prostitute, saying "'I got hurt in the war,' I said. [Georgette said] 'Oh, that dirty war.'" They don't need to specify what war, since the phrase makes absolute sense within the context of their lives.

Ironically, there is not just a similarity in the groups, but in the main characters themselves. Both Jake and Mr. Stevens are unable or incapable of expressing their affection for a female friend, both suffered from the war in some form, and both look to the future at the end of their respective books. Hemingway, the author of **The Sun Also Rises**, manages to write more authentically about the period seeing as he lived in it, but Kazuo Ishiguro, author of **The Remains of the Day** manages to get a more complete picture about the Lost Generation - one Hemingway could not have even conceived of.

In conclusion, group identities change quickly, and social acceptability changes quicker, especially after times of trauma, where we see the wholesale abandonment of previous morals in **The Sun Also Rises**. However, it is not just the times that change the people, but also how the people act according to the times that define them. As warfare and strife in the modern world, combined with economic stress and fear become more and more of an issue in our modern world, it would be important to look to the future with this lens of the past, so that the mistakes of the Lost Generation are not repeated, and we do what is moral over what becomes socially acceptable so that there is no meandering and wanton abandon with our lives, and we instead find the spark which humans throughout history have been looking for - the spark that shows humanity its greater purpose.

### Sources Cited

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