The 20th century

WRITING FROM 1914 TO 1945

Important movements in drama, poetry, fiction, and criticism took form in the years before, during, and after World War I. The eventful period that followed that war left its imprint upon books of all kinds. Literary forms of the period were extraordinarily varied, and in drama, poetry, and fiction leading authors tended toward radical technical experiments.

**Experiments in drama.** Although drama in the 19th century had not been a major art form, no type of writing was more experimental than the new drama that arose as in rebellion against the glib commercial stage. In the early years of the 20th century, Americans travelling abroad found a vital theatre flourishing in Europe; returning home, some of them became active in founding a Little Theatre movement throughout the country. Freed from commercial limitations, playwrights experimented with dramatic forms and methods of production, and in time producers, actors. and dramatists appeared who had been trained in college classrooms and community playhouses. Some Little Theatre groups became commercial producers: for example, the Washington Square Players, founded in 1915, which became the Theatre Guild (first production in 1919). The resulting drama was marked by a spirit of innovation and by a new seriousness and maturity.

Eugene O'Neill, the most admired dramatist of the period, was a product of this movement. He worked with the Provincetown Players before his plays were commercially produced. His dramas are remarkable for their range. *Beyond the Horizon* (first performed 1920), *Anna Christie* (1921), *Desire Under the Elms* (1924), and *The Iceman Cometh* (1946) were naturalistic works, while *The Emperor Jones* (1920) and *The Hairy Ape* (1922) made use of the Expressionistic techniques developed in German drama between 1914 and 1924. He also employed a stream‑of‑consciousness form in *Strange Interlude* (1928) and produced a work of that combined myth, family drama, and psychological analysis in *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931).

No other dramatist was as generally praised as O'Neill but many others wrote plays that reflected the growth of a serious and varied drama, including Maxwell Anderson, whose verse dramas have dated badly, and Robert E. Sherwood, a Broadway professional who wrote both comedy (Reunion in Vienna [1931]) and tragedy (There Shall Be No Night [1940]). Marc Connelly wrote touching fantasy in a Negro folk biblical play, *The Green Pastures* (1930). Like O'Neill, Elmer Rice made use of both Expressionistic techniques *(The Adding Machine* [1923]) and naturalism *(Street Scene* [1929]). Lillian Hellman wrote powerful, well-crafted melodramas in *The Children's Hour* (1934) and *The Little Foxes* (1939). Radical theatre experiments included Marc Blitzstein savagely stairic musical *The Cradler Will Rock* (1937) and the work of Orson Welles and John Houseman for the Federal Theatre Project. The premier radical theatre of the decade was the Group Theatre (1931-41) under Harold Clurman and Lee Strasberg, which became best known for preenting the work of Clifford Odets. In *Waiting for Lefty* (1935), a stirring plea for labour unionism, Odets roused the audience to an intense pitch of fervor, and in *Awake and Sing (*1935), perhaps the best play of the decade, he created a lyrical work of family conflict and youthful yearning. Other key Odets plays at the Group were *Paradise Lost* (1935), *Golden Boy* (1937) and *Rocket to the Moon* (1938). Thornton Wilder used stylized settings and poetic dialogue in *Our Town (*1938) and turned to fantasy in *The Skin of Our Teeth (*1942). William Saroyan shifted his lighthearted, anarchic vision from fiction to drama with *My Heart's in the Highlands* and *The Time of Your Life* (both 1939).

**The new poetry**. Poetry ranged between traditional types of verse and experimental writing that departed radically from the established forms of the 19th century. Two New England poets, Edwin Arlington Robinson and Robert Frost, who were not noted for technical experimentation, both won critical as well as popular acclaim in this period. Robinson, whose first book appeared in 1896, found sonnets, ballad stanzas, and blank verse satisfactory to his thought. In the 1920s he won three Pulitzer Prizes--for his *Collected Poems* (published 1921) *The Man Who Died Twice*  (1925), and *Tristram* (1927). Like Robinson, Frost used traditional stanzas and blank verse in volumes such as A *Boy's Will* (1913), his first book, and *North of Boston* (1914), *New Hampshire* (1923), A Fur*ther Range* (1936), and A *Masque of Reason (*1945). The best known poet of his generation, Frost, like Robinson, saw and commented upon the tragic aspects of life in great poems like "Design," "Directive," and "Provide, Provide."

Just as modern U.S. drama had its beginnings in little theatres, modern U.S. poetry took form in little magazines. Particularly important was Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, founded by Harriet Monroe in Chicago in 1912. The surrounding region soon became prominent as the home of three poets: Vachel Lindsay, Carl Sandburg, and Edgar Lee Masters. Lindsay's blend of legendary lore and native oratory in irregular odelike forms was well adapted to oral presentation, and his lively readings from his works contributed to the success of such books as *General William Booth Enters into Heaven and Other Poems* (1913) and *The Congo, and Other Poems* (1914). Sandburg wrote of life on the prairies and in Middle Western cities in Whitmanesque free verse in such volumes as *Chicago Poems* (1916) and *The People, Yes* (1936). Masters' very popular *Spoon River Anthology* (1915) consisted of free‑verse monologues by village men and women, most of whom spoke bitterly of their frustrated lives.

Writing traditional sonnets and brief, personal lyrics, Edna St. Vincent Millay and Sara Teasdale were innovative in being unusually frank (according to old standards) for women poets. Three fine Negro poets--James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, and Countee Cullen--also found old molds satisfactory for dealing with new subjects, specifically the problems of their race. While Conrad Aiken experimented with poetical imitations of symphonic forms often mingled with stream‑of‑consciousness techniques, e.e. cummings used typographical novelties to produce poems that had surprisingly fresh impact. Marianne Moore invented and brilliantly employed a kind of free verse that was marked marked by a wonderfully sharp and idiosyncratic focus on objects and details. Robinson Jeffers used violent imagery and modified free or blank verse to express perhaps the most bitter views voiced by a major poet in this period.

Except for a period after World War Il, when he was confined in St. Elizabeth's Hospital, Washington, D.C., Ezra Pound lived outside the United States after 1908. He had, nevertheless, a profound influence on 20th‑century writing in English, both as a practitioner of verse and as a patron and impresario of other writers. His most controversial work remained *The Cantos,* the first installment of the which appeared in 1925 and the latest in 1959 *(Thrones: 96‑109 de los cantares).*

Like Pound, to whom he was much indebted, T.S. Eliot lived abroad most of his life, becoming a British subject in 1927. His first volume, *Prufrock and Other Obserations,* was published in 1917. In 1922 appeared *The Waste Land*, the poem by which he first became famous. As a poet and critic. Eliot exercised a strong influence especially in the period between World Wars I and II. In what some critics regard as his finest work, *Four Quartets* (1943), Eliot explored through images of great beauty and haunting power his own past, the past of the human race, and the meaning of human history.

Eliot was an acknowledged master for a varied group of poets whose work was indebted to 17th‑century English Metaphysical poets, especially to John Donne. Eliot's influence was clear in the writings of Archibald MacLeish, whose earlier poems showed resemblances to *The Waste Land*. A number of Southern poets (who were also critics) were influenced by Eliot-‑John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, and Allen Tate. Younger American Metaphysicals who emerged later included Louise Bogan, Leonie Adams, Muriel Rukeyser, Delmore Schwartz, and Karl Shapiro. But there were several major poets, strongly opposed to Eliot's influence, whose style and subjects were far more Romantic and visionary. These included Hart Crane, whose long poem *The Bridge* (1930) aimed to create a Whitmanesque American epic, and Wallace Stevens, a lush and sensuous writer who made an astonishing literary debut with the poems collected in *Harmonium* (1923). Another opponent was William Carlos Williams, whose experimental prose and magically simple lyrics in works like *Spring and All* (1923) were taken up with the mundane details of American life, and who wrote about American myth and cultural history with great sweep in *In the American Grain* (1925).

**Fiction**. The little magazines that helped the growth of the poetry also contributed to developing the fiction of the era. They printed daring or unconventional short stories and published attacks upon the established writers. The *Dial* (1880‑1929), the *Little Review* (1914‑29), the *Seven Arts* (1916‑17), and others encouraged modernist innovation. More potent were two magazines edited by the ferocious but humorous journalist‑critic H.L. Mencken--*The Smart Set* (editorship 1914‑23) and *American Mercury* (which hecoedited between 1924 and 1933). A powerful influence, Mencken helped launch the new fiction.

Mencken's major enthusiasm including the fiction of Joseph Conrad and Theodore Dreiser, but he also promoted minor writers for their attacks on gentility, such as James Branch Cabell. Cabell, or their revolt against the narrow, frustrated quality of of life in rural communities, including Zona Gale and Ruth Suckow. The most distinguished of these writers was Sherwood Anderson. His *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) and *Triumph of the Egg (*1921) were collections of short stories that showed villagers suffering from all sorts of phobias and suppressions. Anderson also wrote several novels, the best being *Poor White* (1920).

In 1920 critics noticed that a new school of fiction had risen to prominence with the success of books such as F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* and Sinclair Lewis' *Main Street, fictions that were more frankly psychological or more modern in their unsparing portrayals of contemporary life. N*ovels of the 1920's were often more lyrical, more personal, but also, in the despairing mood that followed World War I, more disillusioned. Novels of the 1930's tended more towards radical social criticism, in response to the miseries of the Depression, though some of the best, by writers like William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Henry Roth, and Nathanael West, continued in the more modernist vein of the previous decade.

*Critics of society.* F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* (1920) showed the disillusionment and moral disintegration of post‑World War I America. The book initiated a career of great promise that found fruition in *The Great Gatsby* (1925), a spare but poignant novel about the promise and failure of the American Dream. Fitzgerald would go on to live out this theme himself. Though damaged by drink and by a failing marriage, he would go on to do some of his best work in the 1930's, including numerous stories and essays as well as his most ambitious novel, *Tender Is the Night* (1934). Unlike Fitzgerald, who was a lyric writer with real emotional intensity, Sinclair Lewis was best as a social critic. His onslaughts against the "village virus" *(Main Street* [1920]), average businessmen *(Babbitt* I1922]). materialistic scientists *(Arrowsmith* [1925]), and the racially prejudiced *(Kingsblood Royal* [1947]) were satirically sharp and thoroughly documented, though *Babbitt* is his only book that still stands up brilliantly today. Similar careful documentation, though little satire, characterized James T. Farrell's naturalistic *Studs Lonigan* trilogy (1932‑35), which described the stifling effects of a lower middle-class family and a street-corner milieu in the Chicago of the 1920's. The ironies of racial identity dominate the stories and novels produced by writers of the Harlem Renaissance, including the portraits of the black middle class in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* (1928) and *Passing* (1929) and the powerful stories of Langston Hughes in *The Ways of White Folks* (1934), as well as the varied literary materials collected in Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923). Richard Wright's books, including *Uncle Tom's Children (*1938), *Native Son (*1940) and *Black Boy* (1945), were burning works of social protest, Dostoevskyan in their intensity, dealing boldly with the plight of the Negro, especially in the urban ghetto. Zora Neale Hurston's training in anthropology and folklore contributed to *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), her powerful feminist novel about the black Florida town in which she had grown up.

A number of authors wrote proletarian novels attacking capitalist exploitation, including several novels based on a 1929 strike in the textile mills in Gastonia, NC, such as Fielding Burke's *Call Home the Heart* and Grace Lumpkin's *To Make My Bread* (both 1932). Other notable proletarian novels *included Jack Conroy's* The Disinherited *(1933), Robert Cantwell's* The Land of Plenty *(1934), and Albert* Halper's *Union Square* (1933), *The Foundry* (1934), and *The Chute* (1937), as well as some grim evocations of the drifter and "bottom dogs" of the Depression era in Edward Anderson's *Hungry Men* and Tom Kromer's *Waiting For Nothing* (both 1935). The radical movement, combined with a nascent feminism, encouraged the talent of several politically committed women writers whose work would later be rediscovered, such as Tillie Olsen, Meridel LeSueur, and Josephine Herbst.

Particularly admired as a protest writer was John Dos Passos, who first attracted attention with an anti-World War I novel, *Three Soldiers (*1921). His most sweeping indictments of the modern social and economic system, *Manhattan Transfer* (1925) and the *U.S.A.* trilogy *(The 42nd Parallel*, *1919*, and *The Big Money* [1930-36]), employed various narrative innovations such as the "camera eye" and "newsreel" to attack society from the left.

Nathanael West's novels, including *Miss Lonelyhearts* (1933), *A Cool Million* (1934), and *The Day of The Locust* (1939), used black comedy to create a bitter vision of an inhuman and brutal world. West evoked the tawdry but rich materials of mass culture and popular fantasy to mock the pathos of the American Dream, a frequent target during the Depression years.

*Hemingway, Faulkner, and Steinbeck.* Three authors whose writings showed a shift from disillusionment were Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, and John Steinbeck. Hemingway's early short stories and his first novels, *The Sun Also Rises (*1926) and *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), were full of the existential disillusionment of the "lost generation" expatriates. The Spanish Civil War, however, led him to take up the possibility of collective action to solve social problems, and his less effective novels including *To Have and Have Not* (1937) and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), embodied this new belief. He regained some of his form in *The Old Man and The Sea (*1952) and his posthumous memoir of Paris between the wars, *A Moveable Feast* (1964). Hemingway's great impact on other writers came from his deceptively simple, stripped-down prose, full of unspoken implication, and from his tough but vulnerable masculinity, which created a myth that imprisoned the author and haunted the World War II generation.

Hemingway's great rival as a stylist and mythmaker was William Faulkner, whose writing was as baroque as Hemingway's was spare. Influenced by Sherwood Anderson, Melville, and especially Joyce, he combined stream‑of‑consciousness techniques with rich social history. Works like *The Sound and the Fury (*1929), As I *Lay Dying (1930), Light in* August (1932), and *The Hamlet (1940)* were parts of the unfolding of a history of Yoknapatawpha County, a mythical Mississippi community, which showed his convictions about the decadence of the South. Faulker's work was dominated by a sense of guilt going back to the Civil War and the appropriation of Indian lands. Though often comic, his work pictured the disintegration of the leading families and, in later books like *Go Down, Moses* (1942) and *Intruder in the Dust* (1948), showed a growing concern with the troubled role of race in Southern life.

Steinbeck's career, marked by uneven achievements, began with a historical novel, *Cup of Gold* (1929), in which he voiced a distrust of society and a glorification of the anarchistic individualist typical of the rebellious 1920s. He showed his affinity for colorful outcasts, such as the *paisonos* of the Monterey area, in short novels like *Tortilla Flat* (1935), the fable *Of Mice and Men* (1937), and *Cannery Row* (1945). His best books were inspired by the social struggles of migrant farm workers during the Depression, including the simply written but ambiguous strike novel, *In Dubious Battle* (1936), and *his flawed masterpiece, The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). The latter, a protest novel interrupted by prose‑poem interludes, tells the story of the migration of the Joads, an Oklahoma Dust Bowl family, to California. During their almost Biblical journey, they learn the necessity for collective action among the poor and downtrodden to prevent them from being destroyed individually.

*Lyric fictionists.* An interesting development in fiction, abetted by modernism, was a shift from naturalistic to poetic writing. There was an increased tendency to select details and endow them with symbolic meaning, to set down the thought processes and emotions of the characters, and to make use of rhythmical prose. In varied ways, Crane, Norris, Cabell, Dos Passos, Hemingway, Steinbeck, and Faulkner all showed evidence of this--in passages, in short stories, and even in entire novels. Faulkner showed the tendency at its worst in A Fable (1954), which, ironically, won a Pulitzer Prize.

Lyricism was especially prominent in the writings of Willa Cather. O *Pioneers!* (1913), *The Song of the Lark* (1915), and *My Antonia (1918)* contained poetic passages about the disappearing frontier and the creative efforts of frontier folk. *A Lost Lady (1923)* was elegiac in form, though it also depicted a historic social transformation, and *Death Comes for the Archbishop (1927)* was an exaltation of the past and of spiritual pioneering. Katherine Anne Porter, whose works took the form of novelettes and stories, wrote more in the style of the Metaphysical poets. Her use of the stream‑of‑consciousness method in *Flowering Judas (1930)* and *Pale Horse, Pale Rider (1939)* had the complexity, the irony, and the symbolic sophistication characteristic of these poets, whose work the modernists had brought into fashion.

Two of the most intensely lyrical works of the 1930s were autobiographical novels set in the Jewish ghetto of New York's Lower East Side before World War I, Michael Gold's harsh *Jews Without Money* (1930) and Henry Roth's Proustian *Call It Sleep* (1934), one of the greatest novels of the decade. They followed in the footsteps of a prolific writer of the 1920s, Anzia Yezierska, whose passionate books about immigrant Jews, especially *Bread Givers* (1924), have been rediscovered by contemporary feminists.

Another lyrical and autobiographical writer, whose books have faded badly, was Thomas Wolfe, who put all his strivings, thoughts, and feelings into works like *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929) and *Of Time and the River* (1935) before his early death in 1938. These Whitmanesque books, and posthumously edited ones like *The Web and the Rock (1939)* and You *Can'*t *Go Home Again (1940),* dealt with a figure much like Wolfe--his youth in the South, his young manhood in the North, and his eternal search to fulfill a vision. Though grandiose, they influenced many young writers who followed, including Jack Kerouac.

**Literary criticism.** Some historians, looking back over the first half of the 20th century, were inclined to think that it was particularly noteworthy for its literary criticism. Beyond doubt, criticism thrived as it had not for several generations. It was an important influence on literature itself and it shaped the perceptions of readers in the face of difficult new writing.

The period began with a battle between a group who called themselves the New Humanists--a group that stood for the older values in judging literature--and another group who urged that old standards be overthrown and new ones adopted. The New Humanists like Irving Babbitt, a Harvard University professor, and Paul Elmer More, were moralists whose work found an echo in neo-traditionalist writers like T.S. Eliot, who shared their dislike of naturalism, romanticism, and the liberal faith in progress. The leader of the opposition, hardly a liberal himself, was the pugnacious H.L. Mencken, who insisted that the duty of writers was to present "the unvarnished truth" about life. His magazine articles and reviews gathered in *Prejudices (1919‑27), ushered in the iconoclasm of the 1920s, preparing the ground for satiric writers like Sinclair Lewis.* With his dislike of cant and hypocrisy, Mencken helped liberate American literature from its moralistic framework.

*Socio‑literary critics.* In this period of social change, it was natural for critics to consider literature in relationship to society and politics, as most 19th-century critics had done. The work of Van Wyck Brooks and V.L. Parrington illustrated two of the main approaches. In *America's Coming‑of-Age (*1915), *Letters and Leadership* (1918), and *The Ordeal of Mark Twain (*1920), Brooks scolded the American public and attacked the philistinism, materialism, and provinciality of the Gilded Age. But Brooks retreated from his critical position in the popular Makers and Finders series, which included *The Flowering of New England* (1936), *New England: Indian Summer (1940), The World of Washington Irving (*1944), *The Times of Melville and Whitman* (1947), and *The Confident Years* (1952). These books wove an elaborate cultural tapestry of the major and minor figures in American literature. In *Main Currents in American Thought* (1927‑30), Parrington, a progressive, reevaluated American literature in terms of its adherence to the tenets of Jeffersonian democracy.

The growth of Marxian influence upon thinking in the 1920s and '30s was shown in critical works by V.F. Calverton, Granville Hicks, Malcolm Cowley, and Bernard Smith, as well as numerous articles in journals like the *Modern Quarterly*, *New Masses*, *Partisan Review*, and *The New Republic*. Though the enthusiasm for Communism waned, Marxism contributed to the historical approach of outstanding critics like Edmund Wilson and Kenneth Burke and to the whole school of New York intellectuals, such as Lionel Trilling and Philip Rahv, that formed around *Partisan Review*.

*Moral‑aesthetic critics.* Wilson and Burke, like Malcolm Cowley, Morton D. Zabel, Newton Arvin, and F.O. Matthiessen, tried to strike a balance between social and moral or aesthetic concerns. They were interested in both analyzing and evaluating literary creations--eager to see in detail how a literary work was constructed yet also to place it in a larger social or moral framework. Like all critics of the period, their work showed the influence of T.S. Eliot. In essays and books *like* The Sacred Wood *(1920) and The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933), he drew close attention to the language of literature yet also made sweeping judgments and large cultural generalizations. His main impact was on close readers of poetry--I.A. Richards, William Empson, and F.R. Leavis in England, the New Critics in America, many of whom were also poets besides being political and cultural conservatives. Along with Eliot they rewrote the map of literary history, challenged the dominance of Romantic forms and styles, promoted and analyzed difficult modernist writing, and greatly advanced ways of discussing literary structure. Major examples of their style of close reading can be found in R.P. Blackmur's *The Double Agent* (1935), Allen Tate's *Reactionary Essays on Poetry and Ideas* (1936), John Crowe Ransom's *The World's Body* (1938), Yvor Winters's *Maule's Curse* (1938), and Cleanth Brooks's *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947). Though they were later attacked for their formalism and for avoiding the social context of writing, the New Critics did much to further the understanding and appreciation of literature.

(Wa.B./M.D.)

AFTER WORLD WAR II

The literary historian Malcolm Cowley described the years between the two world wars as a "second flowering" of American writing, Certainly American literature attained a new maturity and a richer diversity in the 1920s and '30s, and significant works by several major figures from those decades were published after 1945. Faulkner, Hemingway, Steinbeck, and Katherine Anne Porter wrote memorable fiction; and Frost. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, e.e. cummings, William Carlos Williams, and Gwendolyn Brooks published important poetry. Eugene O'Neill's most distinguished play, *Long Day's Journey into Night,* appeared posthumously in 1956. Before and after World War II, Robert Penn Warren published influential fiction, poetry, and criticism. His All *the Kings Men* one of the best American political novels, won the 1947 Pulitzer Prize. Henry Miller's fiction, influential primarily because of its frank exploration of sexuality, first appeared in the United States in the 1960s. Still, impressive new novelists poets and playwrights appeared after the war. There was, in fact, a gradual changing of the guard.

Not only did a new generation emerge from the war but its ethnic, regional, and social character was quite different. Where once American writing had been dominated by white male writers from New England, New York, the Midwest, and the South, many of the younger writers were Jews and other children of immigrants, blacks who were only a few generations away from slavery, and, eventually, women who, with the help of feminism, would find their voice in a new way. Though the social climate of the postwar years was conservative, even conformist, some of the most hotly discussed new talents were homosexual or bisexual writers like Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote, Gore Vidal, and James Baldwin, whose dark themes and experimental methods cleared a path for Beat writers like Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac.

**The novel and short story**. Two distinct groups of novelists responded to the cultural impact, and especially the technological horror, of World War II. Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead (1948)* and Irwin Shaw's *The Young Lions (1948)* were realistic war novels, though Mailer's book was also a political novel, a novel of ideas, analyzing fascism and power as elements of the military mind. James Jones, mobilizing a staggering quantity of closely observed detail, documented the war's human cost in an ambitious trilogy, *From Here to Eternity (1951) The Thin Red Line (1962)* and *Whistle (1978), works that center on loners who resist adapting to military discipline.* Younger novelists, profoundly shaken by Hiroshima and the real threat of human annihilation, found the conventions of realism inadequate for treating the war's nightmarish implications. In *Catch‑22* (1961), Joseph Heller satirized the military mentality with surreal black comedy yet a sense of Kafkaesque horror. Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., in *Slaughterhouse‑Five* (1969), described the Allied firebombing of the German city of Dresden with a mixture of dark fantasy and numb, loopy humour. Later this method would be applied brilliantly to the Vietnam war--a conflict that seemed in itself surreal--by Tim O'Brien in *Going After Cacciato* (198 ).

In part because of the atomic bomb, American writers turned increasingly to black humour and absurdist fantasy. Many found the naturalistic approach incapable of communicating the rapid pace and the sheer implausibility of contemporary life. A highly self‑conscious fiction emerged, laying bare its own devices, questioning the nature of representation, and often imitating or parodying earlier fiction rather than social reality. Russian‑born Vladimir Nabokov and the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges were strong influences on this new "metafiction." Nabokov, who became a U.S. citizen in 1945, produced a body of exquisitely wrought fiction distinguished by linguistic and formal innovation. Despite their artificiality, a strong emotional thread runs through his best novels, including *Lolita (1955), Pnin* (1957), and *Pale Fire* (1962).

In a major 1967 essay, "The Literature of Exhaustion," John Barth declared himself an American disciple of Nabokov and Borges. After dismissing realism as a "used up" tradition, Barth described his own work as "novels which imitate the form of the novel, by an author who imitates the role of Author." In fact, Barth's earliest fiction, *The Floating Opera* (1956) and *The End of the Road* (1958), fell partly within the realistic tradition, but in later, more ambitious work, he simultaneously imitated and parodied conventional forms--the historical novel in *The Sot‑Weed Factor* (1960), Greek and Christian myth in *Giles Goat‑Boy* (1966), and the epistolary novel in *Letters* (1979). Similarly, Donald Barthelme mocked the fairy tale in *Snow White* (1967) and Freudian fiction in *The Dead Father* (1975). Barthelme was most successful in his short stories and parodies that solemnly caricatured contemporary styles, especially the richly suggestive pieces collected in *Come Back, Dr. Caligari* (1968), *City Life* (1970), and, on the lighter side, *Guilty Pleasures* (1974).

Thomas Pynchon emerged as the major American practitioner of the absurdist fable. His novels and stories are elaborately plotted mixtures of historical information, comic-book fantasy, and countercultural suspicion. Using paranoia as a structuring device as well as a cast of mind, Pynchon worked out elaborate "conspiracies" in *V.* (1963), *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), and *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973). The underlying assumption of Pynchon's fiction was the inevitability of entropy--the disintegration of physical and moral energy. Pynchon's technique would later influence writers as different as Don DeLillo and Paul Auster. In *Naked Lunch* (1959) and other novels, William Burroughs, abandoning plot and coherent characterization, used a drug addict's consciousness to depict a hideous modern landscape. Vonnegut, Terry Southern, and John Hawkes were other major practitioners of black humour and the absurdist fable. Other influential portraits of outsider figures included the Beat characters in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957), *The Dharma Bums* (1958), *Desolation Angels* (1965), and *Visions of Cody* (1973), the young Rabbit Angstrom in John Updike's *Rabbit, Run* (1960) and *Rabbit Redux* (1971), Holden Caulfield in J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* (1951), and the troubling madman in Richard Yates's powerful novel of suburban life, *Revolutionary Road* (1961).

Though writers like Barth, Barthelme, and Pynchon rejected the novel's traditional function as a mirror reflecting society, a significant number of contemporary novelists were reluctant to abandon social realism. In such novels as *The Victim* (1947), *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953), *Herzog* (1964), *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970), and Hum*boldt's Gift* (1975), Saul Bellow tapped into the buoyant, manic energy and picareqsue structure of black humor, while proclaiming the necessity of "being human." While few contemporary writers saw the ugliness of urban life more clearly than Bellow, his central characters rejected the "Wasteland outlook" associated with modernism. A mystical vision, derived from sources as diverse as Judaism, American Transcendentalism, and Rudolph Steiner's cultish Theosophy, found its way into Bellow's late novels, but he also wrote darker fictions like the novella *Seize the Day* (1956), a study in failure and blocked emotion that was perhaps his best work. Four other Jewish writers--Bernard Malamud, Grace Paley, Philip Roth, and Isaac Bashevis Singer--treated the human condition with humour and forgiveness. Malamud's gift for dark comedy and Hawthornean fable was especially evident in his short‑story collections *The Magic Barrel* (1958) and *Idiots First* (1963). His first three novels *The Natural (1952), The Assistant, (1957)* and *A New Life* (1966) were also impressive works of fiction, and *The Assistant* had the bleak moral intensity of his best stories. Grace Paley's stories combined an offbeat, whimsically poetic manner with a wry understanding of the ironies of family life and progressive politics. While Roth was best known for the wild satire and sexual hi-jinx of *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969), which was a hilarious stand-up routine about ethnic stereotypes, his most lasting achievement may be his later novels built around the misadventures of a controversial Jewish novelist named Zuckerman, especially *The Ghost Writer* (1979), *The Anatomy Lesson* (1983), and *The Counterlife* (1987), his best book. Like all his later works, from *My Life as a Man* (1974) to *Operation Shylock* (1993), *The Counterlife* plays ingeniously on the relationship between autobiography and fiction. The Polish‑born Singer won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1978 for his stories, written originally in Yiddish. They evolved from fantastic tales of demons and angels to realistic fictions set on New York's Upper West Side, showing him to be one of the great storytellers of modern times.

The sexual and moral confusion of the American middle class was the focus of the work of J.D. Salinger and Richard Yates, as well as John Updike's Rabbit series (four novels from *Rabbit Run* [1960] to *Rabbit At Rest* [1990]), *Couples* (1968), and *Too Far to Go* (1979), a sequence of tales about the quiet disintegration of a civilized marriage. Updike's mentor, John Cheever, long associated with *The New Yorker* magazine, created in his short stories and novels a gallery of memorable eccentrics. He documented the anxieties of upper middle-class New Yorkers and suburbanites in the relatively tranquil years after the war. In sharp contrast, Nelson Algren *(The Man with the Golden Arm* [1949]) and Hubert Selby, Jr. *(Last Exit to Brooklyn [*1964]), documented lower‑class urban life with brutal frankness. Similarly, John Rechy portrayed America's urban homosexual subculture in *City of Night* (1963). As literary and social mores were liberalized, Cheever himself dealt with homosexuality in his prison novel *Falconer* (1977), and even more explicitly in his personal journals, published posthumously in 1991.

Post‑World War II Southern writers inherited Faulkner's rich legacy. Three women, specialists in the grotesque--Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor, and Carson McCullers--contributed greatly to Southern fiction. O'Connor, writing as a Catholic in the Protestant South, created a high comedy of moral incongruity in her incomparable short stories. Welty, always a brilliant stylist, first came to prominence with her collections of short fiction, *A Curtain of Green* (1941) and *The Wide Net* (1943). Her career culminated with a large family novel, *Losing Battles* (1970) and a fine novella, *The Optimist's Daughter (1972),* awarded the 1973 Pulitzer Prize. Initially known for his lyrical portraits of Southern eccentrics *(Other Voices Other Rooms* [1948]), Truman Capote published *In Cold Blood (1966),* a cold but impressive piece of documentary realism that contributed, along with the work of Tom Wolfe and Norman Mailer, to the emergence of a "new journalism" using many of the techniques of fiction. William Styron's overripe first novel, *Lie Down in Darkness* (1951), clearly revealed the Faulkner influence. In two controversial later works, Styron fictionalized the dark side of modern history--*The Confessions of Nat Turner* (1967) depicted an antebellum slave revolt, while *Sophie's Choice* (1979) sought unsuccessfully to capture the full horror of the Holocaust. *Inspired by Faulkner and Mark Twain, William Humphrey wrote two powerful novels set in Texas, Home from the Hill* (1958) and *The Ordways* (1965). The Moviegoer (1961) and *The Last Gentleman* (1966) established Walker Percy as an important voice in Southern fiction. Their musing philosophical style broke sharply with the Gothic tradition, influencing later writers like Richard Ford in *The Sportswriter* (1986). Equally impressive were the novels and stories of Peter Taylor, an impeccable social realist, raconteur, and genial novelist of manners, bringing back a bygone world in works like "The Old Forest" (1985) and *A Summons to Memphis* (1986).

Postwar black writers found alternatives to the Richard Wright tradition of social protest. James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison, both proteges of Wright, wrote polemical essays calling for a literature that reflected the full complexity of black life in America. In his first and best novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), Baldwin portrayed the Harlem world and the black church through his own adolescent religious experiences. Using literary techniques ranging from rural folktale and black humor to social realism, Ralph Ellison wrote a deeply resonant comic novel that dealt with the full range of African-American experience: rural sharecropping, segregated education, northward migration, ghetto hustling, and the lure of competing ideologies like nationalism and Communism. Many considered *Invisible Man* (1952) the best novel of the postwar years. Later, two black women novelists published some of the most important postwar American fiction. In *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Beloved* (1987) and *Jazz* (199 ), Toni Morrison created a strikingly original fiction that sounded different notes from lyrical recollection to magic realism. Like Ellison, Morrison drew on diverse literary and folk influences and dealt with major phases of African-American history--slavery in *Beloved* and the Harlem Renaissance in *Jazz*. She was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1992. Alice Walker, after several volumes of poetry and an interesting novel that dealt with the Civil Rights movement, *Meridian* (1977), received the 1983 Pulitzer Prize for her black feminist novel *The Color Purple*. Black male writers whose work gained attention during this period included Ishmael Reed, whose wild comic techniques resembled Ellison's, James Alan McPherson, a subtle short-story writer, Charles Johnson, whose novels, such as The Oxherding Tale (19 ) and *The Middle Passage* (1990), showed a masterful historical imagination, and Randall Kenan, a gay writer with a strong folk imagination, whose style descends from both Ellison and Baldwin.

Thanks to the horrors of the war, the the cold war and the Bomb, the bizarre feast of consumer culture, and the cultural clashes of the 1960s, many writers argued that reality had grown inaccessible, undermining the traditional social role of fiction. Writers of novels and short stories therefore were under unprecedented pressure to discover, or invent, new and viable kinds of fiction. One response was the postmodern novel of William Gaddis, John Barth, Donald Barthelme, Thomas Pynchon, Robert Coover, Paul Auster, and Don DeLillo--technically sophisticated, highly self-conscious about the construction of fiction and the fictive nature of "reality" itself. These writers deal with themes like imposture and paranoia; their novels are artifacts rather than linear representations of social reality, and they often use realistic techniques ironically. Other responses involved an intensification of realism, including a heightening of violence, of documentation, or of fantasy. A brief discussion of writers as different as Norman Mailer and Joyce Carol Oates will perhaps illustrate these new directions.

In his 1948 World War II novel, *The Naked and the Dead,* Mailer wrote in the Dos Passos tradition of social protest. He subsequently felt the limitations of the naturalism and developed his own brand of surreal fantasy in fables like *An American Dream* (1965) and *Why Are We in Vietnam?* (1967). Like many of the postmodern novelists, his subject was the nature of power, personal as well as political. Yet, it was only when he turned to "nonfiction fiction" or "fiction as history" in *The Armies of the Night* and *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* (both 1968) that Mailer discovered his truest voice, grandiose yet personal, comic but shrewdly intellectual. He refined this approach into a new objectivity in the 1980 Pulitzer Prize "true life novel" *The Executioner's Song*. When he returned to fiction, Mailer's work was of less interest, including a long, mystical novel set in ancient Egypt, *Ancient Evenings (1983) and a mammoth novel about the Central Intelligence Agency,* Harlot's Ghost *(1992).* Mailer was hardly the most consistent contemporary novelist but he was certainly the most protean and unpredictable. In her early work, especially A *Garden of Earthly Delights (1967)* and t*hem (1969)* Joyce Carol Oates worked naturalistically with violent urban materials, such as the Detroit riots. Incredibly prolific, she later experimented with surrealism in *Wonderland* (1971) and Gothic fantasy in *Bellefleur* (1980) before returning in works like Marya (1986) to the bleak blue-collar world of her youth in upstate New York. While Mailer and Oates refused to surrender the novel's gift for capturing reality, both were compelled to search out new fictional modes to tap that power.

The surge of feminism in the 1970s gave impetus to many new women writers, including Erica Jong in her sexy and funny *Fear of Flying* (1974), Rita Mae Brown's exploration of lesbian life in *Rubyfruit Jungle* (1973), Ann Beattie's account of the post-60s generation in *Chilly Scenes of Winter* (1976) and many short stories, Gail Godwin's highly civilized *The Odd Woman* (1978), Mary Gordon's portraits of Irish Catholic life in *Final Payments* (1978), and the many social comedies of Alison Lurie and Anne Tyler. Perhaps he most influential fiction writer to emerge in the 1970s, Raymond Carver, was another realist who dealt with blue-collar life, usually in the Pacific Northwest, in powerful collections of stories like *What People Talk About When They Talk About Love* (1981) and *Cathedral* (1983). His self-destructive characters were life's losers, and his style, influenced by Hemingway and Beckett, was spare, flat, but powerfully suggestive. It was imitated, often badly, by young minimalists like Frederick Barthelme, Mary Robison, and Amy Hempel, but Carver's most talented admirers, including Richard Ford in *Rock Springs* (1987), Russell Banks in *Continental Drift* (1984) and *Affliction* (1989), and Tobias Wolff in *The Barracks Thief* (198 ) and *A Boy's Life* (1989), were also writers saturated in the downbeat world of the blue-collar male. Another strong male-oriented writer in a realist mode, who emerged from the 1960's counterculture, was Robert Stone in *Dog Soldiers* (1974), which dealt grimly with the drugs-and-Vietnam generation, and *A Flag for Sunrise* (1981), a bleak political novel set in Central America and reminiscent of Conrad.

Finally, he dramatic loosening of immigration restrictions in the mid-1960s set the stage for the new multicultural writing of the 1970s and 1980s. Just as Jews, blacks and gay writers had found their voice in the decades after the war, other minorities ventured forth to explore their hyphenated identities as the century drew to a close. Different Jewish voices were heard in the fiction of E.L. Doctorow and Cynthia Ozick, such as the characters based on convicted spies Julius and Ethel Rosenberg and their family in Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel* (1971) and those modeled on leading figures in Yiddish literature in Ozick's best story, "Envy; or, Yiddish in America" (1969). David Leavitt brought gay themes out of the underground and into his portraits of middle-class life in *Family Dancing* (1984). Novels like N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1968, James Welch's *Winter in the Blood* (1973) and *Fools Crow* (1986), Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977), and Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* (1984) and *The Beet Queen* (1986) conveyed a powerful and ambiguous exploration of Native American history and identity. Mexican Americans were represented by works like Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972), Richard Rodriquez's autobiographical *Hunger of Memory* (1981), and Sandra Cisneros's *House on Mango Street* (1984).

Some of the best immigrant writers were thoroughly assimilated, with a strong literary formation, yet had a brilliant feeling for both the old and the new culture, such as the Cuban American writers Oscar Hijuelos in *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love* (1989) and Cristina Garcia in *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992), or the prolific Jamaica Kincaid, the Antigua-born author of *Iron John* (198 ) and *Lucy* (198 ), whose work appeared frequently in *The New Yorker*. Chinese Americans found an extraordinary voice in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976) and *China Men* (1980), which mixed old Chinese lore with fascinating family history. While many multicultural works were merely representative, some made remarkable contributions to a new American literature.

**Poetry.** The postwar years produced a rich abundance and variety of strong poetry but no individual poet as dominant and accomplished as T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens, Robert Frost, or William Carlos Williams, whose long careers were coming to an end. The major poetry from 1945 to 1960 was modernist in its ironic texture yet formal in its insistence on regular rhyme and meter. But beginning in the late 1950's there were a variety of poets and schools who rebelled aginst these constraints and experimented with more open, more colloquial, more surreal, more bardic, or more openly confessional forms.

The leading figure of the late 40s was Robert Lowell, who, under the influence of Eliot and of metaphysical poets like Donne and Hopkins, explored his spiritual torments and family history in *Lord Weary's Castle* (1946). Other impressive formal poets who emerged during the period included Theodore Roethke, influenced by Yeats, who revealed a genius for ironic lyricism and an empathy for natural process in *The Lost Son and Other Poems* (1948), the masterfully elegant Richard Wilbur *(Things of This World* [1956]), two war poets, Karl Shapiro *(V-Letter and Other Poems* [1944]) and Randall Jarrell (Losses [1948]), and young Audenesque poets with brilliant technical skill but much less personal voice, such as James Merrill, W.S. Merwin, James Wright, Adrienne Rich, and John Hollander. (The least four were selected by Auden for publication in the Yale Younger Poets series.)

By the mid-1950's, however, a strong reaction developed. Poets began to look away from Eliot and metaphysical poetry to more Romantic or more prosaic models, including Walt Whitman, William Carlos Williams, Hart Crane, and D.H. Lawrence. At Black Mountain College in western North Carolina, poets like Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, Edward Dorn, and Denise Levertov treated the poem as an unfolding process rather than a containing form. Olson's *Maximus Poems* (1953-68) show a clear affinity with the jagged line and uneven flow of Pound's *Cantos* and Williams's *Paterson*. Allen Ginsberg's incantatory, prophetic "Howl" (1956) and his elegy for his mother, "Kaddish" (1961), gave powerful impetus to the Beat movement. Written with extraordinary intensity, they were inspired by writers as diverse as the Biblical prophets, Blake, Whitman, and the surrealists, as well as the spontaneous jazz aesthetic of his friend, the novelist Jack Kerouac. Other Beat poets included Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Gregory Corso, and Gary Snyder, a student of Eastern religion, who, in *Turtle Island* (1974), continued the American tradition of nature poetry.

The openness of Beat poetry and the prosaic directness of William Carlos Williams encouraged Robert Lowell to develop a new autobiographical style in the laconic poetry and prose of *Life Studies* (1959) and *For the Union Dead* (1964). Lowell's new work influenced nearly all American poets, but especially a group of "confessional" writers, some of them once students of his, such as Anne Sexton in *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* (1960) and *All My Pretty Ones* (1962) and Sylvia Plath in the posthumous *Ariel* (1965), who joined an icy sarcasm to a poetry of white hot emotional extremity. Another poet influenced by Lowell was John Berryman, whose *Dream Songs* (1964, 1968) combine autobiographical fragments with minstrel-show motifs to create a zany style of self-projection and comic-tragic lament. Sexton, Plath, and Berryman all took their own lives.

Through his personal charisma and his magazine *The Fifties* (later *The Sixties* and *The Seventies*), Robert Bly encouraged a number of poets whose work shifted toward the individual voice and open form, including Galway Kinnell, James Wright, David Ignatow, and, less directly, Louis Simpson, James Dickey, and Donald Hall. Sometimes called the "deep image" poets, Bly and his friends sought spiritual intensity and self-transcendence rather than confessional immediacy. Their work was influenced by the surreal association of images in Spanish and Latin American poets like Lorca, Jimenez, Vallejo, and Neruda, but also by the meditative poetry of the later Roethke, with its deep feeling for the subterranean, organic life of nature as a vehicle of spiritual transformation. Yet, like their Hispanic models, they were also political poets who became deeply involved in organizing protest and writing poems against the Vietnam war. Kinnell was a Lawrentian poet who, in poems like "The Porcupine" and "The Bear," gave the brutality of nature the power of myth. His vatic sequence *The Book of Nightmares* (1971) and the quieter poems in *Mortal Acts, Mortal Words* (1980) are among the most rhetorically effective works in contemporary poetry.

James Wright was another writer whose style changed dramatically in the early 60's, from stiffly formal verse to the stripped-down, meditative lyricism of *The Branch Will Not Break* (1963) and *Shall We Gather at the River* (1968), which were more dependent on the emotional tenor of image than on meter, poetic diction, or rhyme. In books like *Figures of the Human* (1964) and *Rescue the Dead* (1968), David Ignatow wrote brief but razor-sharp poems that made their effect though swiftness, deceptive simplicity, paradox, and personal immediacy. A poet who also ran the gamut from prosaic simplicity to Emersonian transcendence was A.R. Ammons. His *Briefings* (1971) were close to autobiographical jottings, small glimpses and observations, but like his longer poems they turned the natural world into a source of vision. Like Ignatow, he made it a virtue to seem unliterary, and found illumination in the pedestrian and the ordinary.

The irresistible concreteness of daily life combined with surreal tricks of association helped inspire a group of New York poets, among them Frank O'Hara, Kenneth Koch, James Schuyler, and John Ashbery. Whether O'Hara was jotting down a sequence of ordinary moments or paying tribute to movie stars, his poems had a breathless immediacy that was distinctive and unique. Koch's comic voice swung effortlessly from the trivial to the fantastic. Strongly influenced by Wallace Stevens, Ashbery's ruminative poems can seem random, discursive, and enigmatic. Avoiding poetic color, they do their work by suggestion and association, exploring the interface between experience and perception.

Other impressive poets of the postwar years were too individual to classify. Elizabeth Bishop's precise, loving attention to objects was was reminiscent of her early mentor, Marianne Moore. Though she avoided the confessional mode of her friend Lowell, her sense of place, her heartbreaking decorum, and her keen powers of observation gave her work a strong personal cast. In *The Changing Light at Sandovar* (1983), James Merrill, previously a polished lyric poet, made his mandarin style the vehicle of a lighthearted personal epic which, with the help of a ouija board, called up the shades of all his dead friends, including the poet Auden. In a prolific career highlighted by poems like *Reflections on Espionage* (1976), "Blue Wine" (1979), and *Powers of Thirteen* (1983), John Hollander, like Merrill, displayed enormous technical virtuosity. Richard Howard imagined witty monologues and dialogues for famous people of the past in poems collected in *Untitled Subjects* (1969) and *Two-Part Inventions* (1974). With the autobiographical knots and parables of *Reasons for Moving* (1968) and *Darker* (1970), Mark Strand's paradoxical language achieved a resonant simplicity.

Other strongly autobiographical poets working with subtle technique and intelligence in a variety of forms included Philip Levine, Charles Simic, Robert Pinsky, Louise Gluck, and Sharon Olds. With the sinuous sentences and long flowing lines of *Tar* (1983) and *Flesh and Blood* (1987), C.K. Williams perfected a narrative technique founded on distinctive voice, sharply etched emotion, and cleanly observed detail. Adrienne Rich's work gained a burning immediacy from her lesbian feminism. *The Will to Change* (1971) and *Diving Into the Wreck* (1973) were major turning points for women's poetry in the wake of the 1960s. That decade also enabled other older poets to become more loosely autobiographical and freshly imaginative, among them Stanley Kunitz, Robert Penn Warren, and W.S. Merwin. The sixties invigorated gifted black poets like Robert Hayden, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Michael S. Harper. It formed the background for the work of the younger poets of the 1980's, such as Edward Hirsch, Alan Shapiro, Jorie Graham, Cathy Song, and Rita Dove, whose sequence about her grandparents, *Thomas and Beulah*, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1987.

**Drama.** Two post‑World War II playwrights established reputations comparable to O'Neill's. In essays, Arthur Miller eloquently defended his belief in a modern, democratic concept of tragedy; *Despite its abstract, allegorical quality and portentous language, Death of a Salesman (*1949) came close to vindicating this belief. Miller's plays were rooted in the socially conscious, ethnic dramatists of the thirties, especially Clifford Odets, but he gave a metaphysical turn to their intense family dramas. From *All My Sons* (1947) to *The Price* (1968), his work is at its strongest when he deals with father-son relationships, anchored in the harsh realities of the Depression. Yet he could also be an effective protest writer, as in *The Crucible* (1953), which used the Salem witch trials to attack the witch-hunting of the McCarthy era. Though his work was uneven, Tennessee Williams must be viewed as a more important playwright than Miller. Creating great roles for actors, especially women, Williams brought a passionate lyricism and a tragic Southern vision to such plays as *The Glass Menagerie* (1944), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), and *The Night of the Iguana (*1961). He empathized with his characters' dreams and illusions, and with the frustrations and defeats of their lives, and he wrote about his own dreams and disappointments in his impressive short fiction, from his plays were often adapted.

Until the 1960s, Miller and Williams so dominated the postwar theatre that few other playwrights emerged to challenge them. Then, in 1962, Edward Albee's reputation, based on short plays like *The Zoo Story* (1959) and *The American Dream* (1960), was secured by the stunning power of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962). A master of absurdist theatre who assimilated the influence of new European playwrights like Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco, Albee emerged as a major figure in postwar American drama. His reputation with critics and audiences began to decline with enigmatic plays like *Tiny Alice* (1964) and *A Delicate Balance* (1966) but, like Eugene O'Neill, he eventually returned to favor with a complex autobiographical drama, *Three Tall Woman*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1994. After the centre of American drama shifted from Broadway to off‑ and off‑off‑Broadway with works like Jack Gelber's *The Connection* (1959), American playwrights, collaborating with adventurous new companies like the Living Theatre and the Open Theatre, were increasingly free to write radical and innovative plays. David Rabe's *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel* (produced in 1971) and *Sticks and Bones* (1972) satirized America's militaristic nationalism and cultural shallowness. David Mamet won a 1976‑77 New York Drama Critics Award for *American Buffalo*. In plays like *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1984) he showed brilliantly how men reveal their hopes and frustrations obliquely, through their language, and in *Oleanna* (1992) he fired a major salvo in the gender wars over sexual harassment.

Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Ed Bullins inspired an angry black nationalist theatre. Baraka's *Dutchman* and *The Slave* (1964) effectively dramatized racial confrontation, while Bullins's *In the Wine Time* (1968) made use of "street" lyricism. Maria Irene Fornes's *Fefu and Her Friends* (1977) proved remarkable in its exploration of women's relationships. A clear indication of off‑Broadway's ascendancy in American drama came in 1979 when Sam Shepard, a prolific and experimental playwright, won the Pulitzer Prize for *Buried Child.* Shepard's earlier work, such *The Tooth of Crime* (1972), was rooted both in the rock scene and counterculture of the sixties and in the mythic world of the American West. But he reached his peak with a series of offbeat family dramas including *Curse of the Starving Class* (1976), *True West* (1980), *Fool For Love* (1983), and *A Lie of the Mind* (1986). Other important new voices in American drama were the prolific Lanford Wilson, the 1980 Pulitzer winner for *Talley's Folly*, John Guare, who created serious farce in *The House of Blue Leaves* (1970) and fresh social drama in *Six Degrees of Separation* (198-), and Ntozake Shange, whose "choreopoem," *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow Is Enuf*, moved to Broadway in 1976. Other well-received new women playwrights included Marsha Norman, Beth Henley, Tina Howe, and Wendy Wasserstein. In a series of plays that included *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (1984), *Fences* (Pulitzer Prize, 1987), and Joe Turner's Come and Gone (198 ), August Wilson emerged as the most powerful black playwright of the 1980's. The anguish of AIDS epidemic proved a dark inspiration to many gay playwrights, especially Tony Kushner, who had gained attention with *A Bright Room Called Day* (198 ) and won Broadway fame with his epically ambitious drama *Angels in America* (1993), which mixed comedy with pain, symbolism with personal history, invented characters with historical ones. But to some extent, performance artists like Spalding Gray, Eric Bogosian, and Anna Deveare Smith, who turned social and personal issues into brilliant monologues, and visually oriented creators like Robert Wilson and Richard Foreman, usurped the place of the traditional playwright.

**Literary and social criticism.** Until his death in 1972, Edmund Wilson solidified his reputation as one of America's most versatile and distinguished men of letters. Novelist John Updike inherited Wilson's chair at *The New Yorker* and turned out an extraordinary flow of critical reviews collected in rich volumes like *Hugging the Shore* (1983) and *Odd Jobs* (1991). Gore Vidal brought together the briskly readable essays of four decades--critical, personal, and political--in *United States* (1993). Susan Sontag's essays on difficult Europrean writers, on avant-garde film, on politics, on photography, and on the language of illness embodied the probing intellectual spirit of the 1960's. In A *Second Flowering* (1973) and *The Dream of the Golden Mountains* (1980), Malcolm Cowley looked back at the writers between the wars who had always engaged him. Alfred Kazin wrote literary history (*An American Procession* [1984]) and autobiography (*Starting Out in the Thirties* [1965]; *New York Jew* [1978]); while Irving Howe produced studies at the crossroads of literature and politics, such as *Politics and the Novel* (1957), as well as a major history of Jewish immigrants in New York, *World of Our Fathers* (1976). The iconoclastic literary criticism of Leslie Fiedler, such as *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960), was marked by its *provocative* application of Freudian ideas to American literature. A more subtle Freudian, Lionel Trilling, in *The Liberal Imagination* (1950) and other works, rejected V.L. Parrington's populist concept of literature as social reportage and insisted on its problematic human complexity. His criticism reflected the inward turn from politics towards "moral realism" that coincided with the Cold War. But the cultural conflicts of the 1960s revived the social approach among younger students of American literature, such as Henry Louis Gates, Jr., who emerged in the 1980s as a major critic, theorist, and editor of black writers in studies like *Figures in Black* (1987) and *The Signifying Monkey* (1988). In the 1990s Gates evolved into a wide-ranging essayist, along with other black social critics like Cornel West, Stanley Crouch, Shelby Steele, and Stephen Carter.

The waning of the New Criticism, with its strict emphasis on the text, led not only to a surge of historical criticism and cultural theory but to a flowering of literary biography. Major works included Leon Edel's five-volume study of Henry James (1953‑72), Mark Schorer's *Sinclair Lewis An American Life* (1961), Richard Ellman's studies of Joyce (1959) and Oscar Wilde (1988), R.W.B. Lewis's revealing biography of Edith Wharton (1975), Joseph Frank's multi-volume biography of Dostoevsky (1976- ), Paul Zweig's brilliant study of Whitman, and Carol Brightman's exhaustive life of Mary McCarthy (1992).

One positive result of the accelerating complexity of postwar life was a body of distinguished journalism and social commentary. John Hersey's *Hiroshima* (1946) was a deliberately controlled, unemotional account of atomic holocaust.ln *Notes of a Native Son* (1955), *Nobody Knows My Name* (1961), and *The Fire Next Time* (1963), black novelist James Baldwin published a body of the most eloquent essays written in America. Norman Mailer's "new journalism" proved especially effective in capturing the drama of political conventions and large protest demonstrations. Novelist Joan Didion published two collections of incisive social and literary commentary, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (1968) and *The White Album* (1979). The title essay of the first collection was an honest investigation of the forces that gave color and significance to the 1960s counterculture, a subject also explored with stylistic flourish by journalists as different as Tom Wolfe and Hunter S. Thompson. The surreal atmosphere of the Vietnam war, infused with rock and drugs, gave impetus to such subjective journalism as Michael Herr's *Dispatches* (1977). The mood of the period also encouraged strong works of autobiography such as Frank Conroy's *Stop-Time* (1967) and Lillian Hellman's personal and political memoirs, including *An Unfinished Woman* (1969) and *Scoundrel Time* (1976). Robert M. Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (1974) defied all classification. Pirsig equated the emotional collapse of his central character with the disintegration of American workmanship and cultural values.

The major New Critics and New York critics were followed by major but difficult academic critics, who preferred theory to close reading. European structuralism found little echo in America, but poststructuralist theorists like Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, and Jacques Derrida found a welcome in the less political atmosphere, marked by skepticism and defeat, that followed the 1960s. Four Yale professors joined Derrida to publish a group of essays, *Deconstruction and Criticism* (1979). Two of the contributors, Paul de Man and J. Hillis Miller, became leading exponents of deconstruction in America. The two others, Harold Bloom and Geoffrey Hartman, were more interested in the problematic relation of poets to their predecessors and to their own language. Bloom was especially concerned with the influence of Emerson on modern American poets. Philosophers Richard Rorty and Stanley Cavell and critic Richard Poirier found a native parallel to European theory in the philosophy of Emerson and the writings of pragmatists like William James and John Dewey. Other academic critics took a more political turn. Stephen Greenblatt's work on Shakespeare and other Renaissance writers and Edward Said's essays in *The World, The Text, and the Critic* (1983) were influential in reviving historical approaches to literature that had long been neglected. Said's studies in *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1992) directed attention to the literary and social effects of colonialism. A whole series of feminist critics beginning with Kate Millett, Ellen Moers, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, and Elaine Showalter gave purpose to new gender-based approaches to past and present writers. All these methods yielded new dimensions of critical understanding, but often became so quickly professionalized, so riddled with jargon, or so highly political that they lost touch with the general reader, with common sense itself, and with any tradition of accessible public criticism. At a time when literature and the arts were under severe pressure from mass culture, academic critics themselves undermined literature, turning their attention from art to ideology in a frankly debunking spirit. (J.R.G./M.D.)

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(Wa.B./J.R.G./M.D.)