The plays of Eugene O'Neill

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, for it was a time when writers were much involved with interpreting life about them. 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 preeminent form, no type of writing embodied wider experimentation than a new drama that arose as a result of 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 in every corner of their 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 drama that resulted 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 ~he Elms* (1924), and *The Iceman Come~h* (1946) were Naturalistic works, while *The Emperor Jones* (1920) and *The Hairy Ape* (1922) made use of the Expressionistic techniques developed in German drama in the period 1914‑24. He also employed a stream‑of‑consciousness form in *S~range Interlude* (1928) and produced a work of subtle psychological analysis in *Mourning Becomes Electra (* 1931).

No other dramatist was as generally praised as O'Neill but many others wrote plays of a high order that reflected the growth of a serious and varied drama. 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*

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[1923]) and Naturalism *(Street Scene* [19\_9]). Beginning as a Realist, Maxwell Anderson turned to verse drama in ***plays such as*** *.F.Elizabeth the Queen* (1930) and *Winterset* ( 1935) and then to musical comedy satire in *Knickerbocker Holiday (* 1938). Robert Sherwood produced a distinguished body of work, writing comedy *(Reunion in Vienna* ~1931]) and tragedy *(There Shall Be No Night* 11940]). Clifford Odets. in *Waiting for Lefty* (1935), a plea for labour unionism, utilized auditorium as well as stage for action and in *Awake and Sing (* 1935) wrote in the vein of Naturalism. Thornton Wilder used stylized settings and poetic dialogue in *Our Town (* 1938) and turned to fantasy in *The Skin of Our Teeth (* 1942).

The new poetry. Poetry ranged between traditional types of verse and experimental writing that departed radically Robinson from the established forms of the 19th century. Two New and Frost 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 and the complexities of human existence and was skeptical of pat solutions.

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. In general. however, the range of experimentation was great. 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 to make her one,of the most distinguished voices in modern U.S. poetry. Stephen Vincent Benet, in *John Brown's Body~* (1928), produced a stirring novel in verse. 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 Pound, had, nevertheless, a profound influence on 20th‑century Eliot,

writing in English, both as a practitioner of verse and as a and the 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).*  century Like Pound, to whom he was much indebted, T.S. Eliot lived abroad most of his life, becoming a British citizen physical in 1927. His first volume, *Prufrock~ and Other Obser*v*ations* was published in 1917. In 1922 appeared *The Was~e ~and* 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 11. 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 the acknowledged master of many members of a varied group of poets whose work was indebted to 17th‑century English Metaphysical poets especially to

**Archibald MacLeish, whose earlier poems** were similar in

both **manner and thought to** *The ~Waste Land.* In later

poems MacLeish voiced a positive belief in social advance

that contrasted with the religious attitude advocated by

Eliot. A number of Southern poets showed affiliations,

though not so clearly--‑John Crowe Ransom. Donald

Davidson, and Allen Tate. Their poems were particularly

concerned with the South--its past and its problems.

Hart Crane had a similar Metaphysical manner but a

subject matter of his own. Other American Metaphysical

having individual qualities of thought and method were

Louise Bogan, Leonie Adams, Muriel Rukeyser, Delmore

Schwartz, and Karl Shapiro.

The **Fiction. The** little magazines that helped the growth

influence of the poetry also contributed to a development of the

of the little fiction of the era. Not only did they print short stones

magazines that diverged from the older patterns, but they also pub‑

lished attacks upon the established writers and stressed the

merits of unconventional fiction. The *Dial* (1880‑1929),

the *Little Review* (1914‑29), the *Seven Ar~s* (1916‑17),

and others encouraged rebellion. More potent than any

of these were two magazines edited by the ferocious but

humorous journalist‑critic H.L. Mencken--*The Smart~ Set~*

(editorship 1914‑23) and *American Mercury* (which he

coedited between 1924 and 1933). Mencken published

short stones in the new manner, attacked established

American beliefs and institutions, and praised fiction writ

ers who were unconventional in thought and manner. A

powerful influence, he helped launch the new fiction.

The trend was indicated by one of Mencken's favourites,

James Branch Cabell. Cabell, who had been writing since

1905, sprang to fame with *Jurgen (* 1919), a novel that

attacked America's orthodoxies and institutions by telling,

a cynical story full of Freudian symbolism. Other au‑

thors whom Mencken favoured launched "a revolt against

the village," an attack on the narrow, frustrated quality

of life in rural communities--*e.g.* Zona Gale and Ruth

Suckow. The most distinguished of these village 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 in time wrote several novels

of superior quality, the best being *Poor White~* (1920),

which treated both a frustrated character and the impact

of industry upon American living.

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.* Thereafter, fiction took on new qualities

related to the modern period. Writers tended toward Re‑

alism and Naturalism--frank portrayals of contemporary

life. There was a trend away, however, from completely

documented Realism toward the selection of detail. The

novelists' portrayal of characters and motives. and even

their selection of detail, were consistently much influenced

by the psychology of Freud and others.

The novel tended to be particularly concerned with the

problems of the day. In the decades that followed, fiction

voiced reactions to changing times: novels of the 1920s

expressed disillusionment with established institutions and

ideologies; some from the 1930s protested against the eco‑

nomic and political system; others advocated remedies of

some sort, telling of new‑found hope and faith. The drift

toward World War 11 and the war itself led many novelists

to see qualities of excellence in American life not before

realized, to voice patriotic enthusiasm. Some authors wrote

works that fell into one or two of these periods; others

ran the gamut from disillusionment to the acquisition of

a new faith. The number of competent--even superior--

novelists was huge, so large that the following study can

discuss only a few of those who generally were felt to be |

outstanding. I

*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 its finest

fruition in *Tile Great~ Gatsby* (1925), a more poignant

and unified development of the same theme. These two

books of criticism of American society were destined to

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be Fitzgerald's best achievements. Like Fitzgerald, Sinclair Lewis was best as 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. Similar careful documentation, thoroughly documented. Similar careful documentation, though little satire, characterized James T. Farrell's Naturalistic *Studs Lonigan* trilogy (1932‑35), which indignantly underlined social inequalities. Similar in pattern were Richard Wright's books that protested against the plight of the Negro--*Uncle Tom's Children (* 1938) and *Native Son (* 1940). A number of authors wrote proletarian novels attacking capitalistic exploitation--*e.g. Albert* Halper in *The Foundry* (1934) and *The Chute* (1937). Satire directed against some of the aristocratic New England groups featured the rather lighter indictments of J.P. Marquand, *The Late George Apley(* 1937) and *Wickford Point (* 1939).

Particularly admired as a novelist of protest 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. His later books, attacks on leftists, had less merit.

A bitter vision of an inhuman and brutal world and a black‑comedy style distinguished Nathanael West's novels, particularly *Miss Lonelyhearts* (1933) and *The Day of ~he Locust* (1939).

*Hemingway Faulkner and Steinbeck.* Three authors whose writings showed a shift from disillusionment were Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, and John Steinbeck. Hemingway's earl,v short stories and his first novels, *The Sun Also Rises (* 19'6) and *A Farewell to* Arms ( 1929), were full of the disillusionment of the 'lost generation" expatriates concerning war and peace. The Spanish Civil War, however, led him to believe in the possibility of collective action to solve social problems, and his novels *To Have and Have Not* (1937). *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940). and *The Old Man and ~he Sea (* 1952) embodied this new belief. At his best, Hemingway showed a power to select and arrange details and to write simple, hardhitting prose that critics found most effective.

Less controlled but equally distinctive, at its best. was the prose of' William Faulkner. His handling of point of view, his use of stream‑of‑consciousness techniques, and even some of his descriptions of backgrounds and actions all at times led to the puzzlement of the reader. But such novels as *The Sound and the Fur! (* 1929), As I *Lay Dying (1930), Light in* August (1932), and *The Hamlet (1940)* overcame handicaps of occasional obscurity. Many of his short stories and novels 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. The picture as a whole was grim and dark, but Faulkner had convictions about the solutions to the problem that became increasingly clear. These were set forth most clearly and explicitly in *Intruder in the Dust* (1948) and *The Reivers* (1962).

Steinbeck's career, marked by uneven achievements, began with a historical novel, *Cup of Gold* (1929), wherein he voiced a distrust of society and a glorification of the anarchistic individualist typical of the rebellious 1920s. Later, however, he appeared to move toward a belief in the possibilities of collectivist action as a pathway to man's salvation. Such, at least, was the implication of *In Dubious Battle* (1936) and *The Grapes of Wrath (1939)* generally considered to bc his best books. The latter is a narrative, interrupted by prose‑poem interludes, of the migration of an Oklahoma Dust Bowl family to California. Their great discovery. symbolically set forth, was the necessity for cooperation among the poor and downtrodden for the betterment of the lot of men.

*Lyric fictionists* An interesting development in fiction was a movement toward poetry. An increased tendency to select details and endow them with symbolic meaning, to set down the thought processes and emotions of the char‑

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acters, and to make use of rhythmical prose gave fiction more of a Iyrical quality than it had had. In varied ways, Crane, Norris, Cabell, Dos Passos, Hemingway, Steinbeck, and Faulkner all showed the trend--in passages, in short stones, and even in entire novels. Faulkner showed the trend at its worst in A *~able (* 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 Los~ Lady (1923)* was elegiac in form, and *Death Comes for ~he Archbishop (1927)* was an exaltation of the past and of spiritual pioneering. Katherine Anne Porter, whose works took the form of novelettes, 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 this group.

Another leading poetic fictionist was Thomas Wolfe, the author of four large novels that were in effect a lyrical recording of his life--his strivings, his thoughts, and his feelings turned into fiction. *Look Homeward Angel (1929) Of Time and ~he River* (1935), *The Web and the Rock ( 1939)* and You *Can* t *Go f~ome 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. The memories of the author of details of his past and his contemplations on the significance and meaning of his experiences were set forth in prose reminiscent of Walt Whitman's poetry. The books, despite their chaotic qualities (or perhaps because of them), were essentially lyrical achievements.

**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 achievements in literary criticism. Beyond doubt, it was true that criticism thrived as it had not for several generations, that It was an important influence on the shaping of literature, and that it quickened the perceptions of readers.

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 a group who urged that old standards be overthrown and new ones adopted. The New Humanists, allied in some ways with the earlier Brahmin critics of New England, were led by Irving Babbitt, a Harvard University professor whose scholarly~ books included *The New Laokoon* (1910), *Rousseau and Romanticism* (1919), *Democracy and Leadership (1924).* and *On Being Creative (1932).* In these books and in vigorous essays Babbitt preached his belief that man ha a tendency toward the good, the true, and the beautiful and a contrary tendency toward evil. The application o this scheme was that modern writers, with their tendency~ toward Naturalism (the base in man's nature), were a vicious influence. Such associates of Babbitt as Paul Elmer More, Norman Foerster, and Stuart Sherman upheld this claim. The leader of the opposition was the pugnacious H.L. Mencken, who doubted that the values of the Ne~ Humanists existed and who claimed that regardless, the, duty of writers was to present "the unvarnished truth about life. His magazine articles and reviews gathered i~ *Prejudices (1919‑27)* shouted this claim, as did the writings of his associates, a number of figures of lesser fame. In the end, the results were the liberation of literature from a number of ancient restrictions and the progress c Naturalism .

*Socio‑literary critics.* In this period of social change, was natural for a number of critics to consider literature in relationship to society and politics. Their study too many forms, but consistently this group judged books ~ (I) reflections of society or *(2)* expressions of social truth Van Wyck Brooks and V.L. Parrington illustrated the t~ chief approaches Brooks, who wrote numerous studies that embodied such an interest, in *America's Coming‑of-Age(* 1915) and *The Ordeal of Mark Twain (* 1920) scolded the American public for making it all but impossible for a

The New Humanists and their opponents

sented rather different pictures but ones developed from similar interests: *The Flowering of New England* (1936), *New England: Indian Summer ( 1940), The World of Washington Irving(* 1944), *The Times of Melvilleand Whitman* (1947), and *The Confident Years* (1952) showed how in the past many authors expressed their time and their locality. Parrington, in *Main Currents in American Thought* (1927‑30), reevaluated American literature in terms of its adherence to the tenets of Jeffersonian democracy.

The growth of Marxian influence upon thinking in the Marxian 1920s and '30s was shown in several books. V.F. Calverton set forth the general principles of Marxian evaluation of literature in *The Newer Spirit (* 1925), and in *The Liberation of American Literature* (1932) judged literary figures on the basis of their representation of life and their implementation of the rise of the proletariat. Granville Hicks' *The Great Tradition* (1933) applied similar yardsticks. Many writers for a time followed the same lines of thinking, but beginning in 1939, as enthusiasm for Communism waned, many (including Hicks) renounced the dogmas of the theory. Some critics, however, found that some Marxian suggestions for critical procedures could be adapted and amended so as to be of service. Two outstanding critics in this group were Edmund Wilson and Kenneth Burke.

*Moral‑aesthetic critics.* Wilson and Burke, however, like many critics of the time, were interested in other matters than just the relationships between literature and society; they were interested in both analyzing and evaluating literary creations. In a sense, they, like other moral-aesthetic critics, were eager to see in detail how a literary work was constructed; however, they were equally eager to assess the sensitivity that the literary work embodied. Morton D. Zabel, himself a leading critic and scholar of modern criticism, suggested that Henry James had aptly formulated the aim of this group when he said, "The critic's judgment, being in the best analysis an estimate of the artist's quality of mind, is at once moral and aesthetic." The group was distinguished, as a result, for its close attention to the creative process involved in a work and for care in ranking the work,

As in poetry, T.S. Eliot here proved a leader. In essays and books--*e g. The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933)--he subjected writings and writers to careful analyses, and he developed the thesis that "the 'greatness' of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards. Others used various ways of discussing relationships between form and value--R.P. Blackmur in *The Double Agent* (1935), Allen Tate in *Reactionary Essays on Poetry and Ideas* (1936), John Crowe Ransom in *The World's Body* (1938), Yvor Winters in *Maule's Curse* (1938), and Cleanth Brooks in *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947). This school of the New Criticism greatly advanced ways of discussing literary structure; it also distinguished and applied contrasting methods of evaluation. It therefore did much to advance the understanding and appreciation of literature. (Wa.B.)

AFTER WORLD WAR 11

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 11, 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 emerged after the war. There was, in fact, a gradual changing of the guard.

The novel and short story. Two distinct groups of nov

elists responded to the cultural impact, and especially the

technological horror, of World War 11. Norman Mail

er's *The Naked and the Dead (1948)* and Irwin Shaw's

*The Young Lions (1948)* were realistic war novels. Using

a Naturalistic technique, James Jones documented the

war's tragic legacy in an ambitious trilogy, *From Here to*

*Eternity (1951) The Thin Red Line (1962)* and *Whis-*

*tle (1978).* Younger novelists, profoundly shaken by Hi‑

roshima and the real threat of human annihilation, found

the Realistic‑Naturalistic tradition inadequate for treat‑

ing the war's nightmarish implications. Joseph Heller, in

*Catch‑22* (1961), satirized the military mentality with sur‑

realistic black humour; and Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., in *Slaugh‑*

*terhouse‑Five* (1969), described the U.S. firebombing of

Dresden, Ger., within a larger context of dark fantasy.

Black In part because of the atomic bomb, American writers

humour of fiction turned increasingly to black humour and ab‑

and surdist fantasy. According to several influential novelists

absurdist and critics, the Realistic‑Naturalistic tradition was out‑

fantasy dated, incapable of communicating the rapid pace and the

sheer implausibility of contemporary life. Consequently, a

highly self‑conscious fiction, which imitated earlier fiction

rather than social reality, emerged. Russian‑born Vladimir

Nabokov and the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges were

strong influences on this new "metafiction." Nabokov,

The

Social

Realists

who became a U.S. citizen in 1945, produced a body of highly sophisticated fiction distinguished by linguistic and formal innovation. His novels *Lolita (1955), Pnin* (1957) *Pale Fire* (1962), and *Ada; or Ardor: A Family Chronicle* (1969) were particularly important. 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, [written] 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 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 While* (1967) and Freudian fiction in *The Dead l a~her* (1975). Barthelme was most successful in his short stories that caricatured contemporary values and institutions.

Thomas Pynchon emerged as the major American practitioner of the absurdist fable. Assuming paranoia to be the only viable reaction to contemporary existence, Pynchon investigated 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. 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.

Inevitably, such writers as Barth, Barthelme, and Pynchon rejected the novel's traditional function as a mirror reflecting society. If existence was incomprehensible, the novelist could hardly assume the Flaubert‑Zola role of social critic, Still, a significant number of contemporary novelists were reluctant to abandon Social Realism. Highly conscious of the contemporary nightmare, 1976 Nobel laureate Saul Bellow nevertheless rejected despair. 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). Bellow proclaimed the necessity of '‑being human." While few contemporary writers saw the ugliness of urban life more clearly than Bellow, his mystical vision, derived from sources as diverse as Judaism and American Transcendentalism, was affirmative. Three other Jewish writers--Bernard Malamud, Philip Roth, and Isaac Bashevis Singer--treated the human condition with humour and forgiveness. Malamud's gifl for comedy was especially evident in his short‑story collection *The Magic Barrel* (1958). His novels *The Natural (1952) The Assistant (1957)* and *The Fixer* (1966) were also significant works of fiction. While Roth was best known for the outrageously satiric novel *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969), his most lasting achievement was his three‑volume account of the misadventures of a controversial Jewish novelist-- *The Ghost Writer (1979) Zuckerman Unbound* (1981), and *The Anatomy Lesson* (1983). The Polish‑born Singer won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1978 for his stories written originally in Yiddish. The sexual and moral confusion of the American middle class was the focus of John Updike's *Rabbit Run* (1960), *Couples* (1968), and *Rabbit Redux* (1971), as it was of the fiction of J.D. Salinger. Long associated with *The New Yorker* magazine, John Cheever created in his short stories and novels a gallery of memorable eccentrics. 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).

Post‑World War Il Southern writers inherited Faulkner's rich legacy. Three women--Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor, and Carson McCullers--further advanced Southern fiction. O'Connor, writing from a deeply religious perspective, provided new directions for Southern Gothicism in her short stories. Always a brilliant stylist, Welty received the 1973 Pulitzer Prize for her novel *The Optimist's Daughter.* Initially known for his lyrical portraits of Southern eccentrics *(Other Voices Other Rooms* [ 1948]), Truman Capote published *In Cold Blood* a classic work of documentary realism, in 1966. William Styron's first novel, *Lie Down in Darkness (* 1951), clearly revealed the Faulkner influence. In two ambitious later works, Styron fictionalized the dark side of human history--*The Confessions of Nat Turner* (1967) depicted an antebellum slave revolt, while *Sophie's Choice* (1979) attempted to capture the horror of the Holocaust. *The Moviegoer (* 1961 ) and *The Last Gentleman* (1966) established Walker Percy as an important voice in Southern fiction. Inspired by Faulkner and Mark Twain, William Humphrey wrote two powerful novels set in Texas, *Home from the Hill* (1958) and *The Ordways (* 1965).

Postwar black writers found alternatives to the Richard Wright tradition of social protest. In a series of essays, James Baldwin called for a literature that reflected the full complexity of black American life. In Go *Tell It on the Mountain* (1953) and ~st *Above My Head* (1979), Baldwin attempted to portray the diversity of the black community. Other writers, however, were more successful in creating a truly complex black fiction. Ralph Ellison combined Afro‑American history with Western myth to produce a modern classic, *Invisible Man* (1952). Later, two black women novelists published some of the most important postwar American fiction. In *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973), and *Song of Solomon* (1977), Toni Morrison created a strikingly original fiction drawing from influences as diverse as Afro‑American history, African and Western mythology, the Western fairy tale, and black folk culture. Alice Walker received the 1983 Pulitzer Prize for her black feminist novel *The Color Purple.*

It is impractical to generalize about postwar American fiction. Since reality itself seemed inaccessible, the traditional social role of fiction was constantly challenged and sometimes totally discarded. Writers of novels and short stories therefore were under unprecedented pressure to discover, or invent, new and viable kinds of fiction. A brief discussion of two of the most fascinating contemporary writers, Norman Mailer and Joyce Carol Oates, will perhaps illustrate this search for new directions. In his 1948 and

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 Realistic‑Naturalistic tradition, however, and turned to his own brand of dark fantasy in *An American Dream* (1965) and *Why Are We in Vietnam?* (1967). Yet, it was only when he turned to ' nonfiction fiction" or "fiction as history" in *The Armies of the Night (* 1968) that Mailer discovered his truest voice. He further refined this approach in the 1980 Pulitzer Prize "true life novel" *The Executioner's* Song. Later, Mailer published a long, mystical novel set in ancient Egypt, *Ancient Evenings (1983).* Mailer was hardly the most consistent contemporary novelist, but he may well have been the most fascinating. In her early work, especially A *Garden of Earthly Delights (1967)* and t*hem (1969)* Joyce Carol Oates worked primarily out of the Naturalistic tradition. Incredibly prolific. she later experimented with Surrealism in *Wonderland ( 1971 )* and Gothic fantasy in *Bellefleur* (1980). While Mailer and Oates refused to surrender the novel's obligation to capture reality, both were compelled to expand new fictional forms in order to fulfill that obligation.

**Poetry.** As with fiction, new voices emerged in postwar poetry. Robert Lowell, for example, produced distinguished dramatic poetry in *Lord Weary's Castle* (1946) and *For the Union Dead* (1964), while Theodore Roethke revealed a genius for ironic Iyricism in *The Lost Son and Other Poems* (1948). Along with Lowell, Roethke, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Robert Penn Warren, such diverse voices as John Berryman (77 *Dream Songs* [1964]), Randall Jarrell *(Losses* 11948]), Louis Simpson *(At the End of the Open Road Poems 11963])* Richard Wilbur *(Things of This World* [1956]), W.D. Snodgrass *(Hearts Needle [* 1959]), and W,S. Merwin ( *The Carrier of Ladders* [1970]) ultimately formed a new establishment in American poetry.

The poet‑critic Yvor Winters inspired a Pacific school of writers of moral focus and plain style, among them his friend J.V. Cunningham and such later poets as N. Scott Momaday and Edgar Bowers. Charles Olson and Robert Creeley were associated with a group inspired by William Carlos Williams and known as the Black Mountain school. The 1950s saw the emergence of the San Francisco "beatniks" (Allen Ginsburg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and Gregory Corso). Gary Snyder, in *Turtle Island* (1974), continued the American tradition of nature poetry; while Galway Kinnell's poetry was shaped by a mythic consciousness. Like **James Dickey,** Kinnell was often fascinated by nature at its most primitive and brutal.

A number of important new women poets appeared. Before her suicide in 1963, Sylvia Plath wrote idiosyncratic, and often painfully introspective, poetry. Adrienne Rich was an important voice in poetry as well as feminist thought. Often as emotional and intimate in subject matter and tone as Plath, Anne Sexton won the 1967 Pulitzer Prize for *Live or Die* while English‑born Denise Levertov published several volumes of poetry after moving to the United States in 1948. Finally, Alice Walker's poetry was often as arresting as her fiction.

**Drama.** Two post‑World War 11 playwrights established reputations comparable to O'Neill's. In essays, Arthur Miller eloquently defended his belief in a modern, democratic concept of tragedy; *Death of a Salesman (* 1949) came close to vindicating this belief. Experimental in form as well as concept. *Salesman* was a distinctly American play. *A// My Sons* (1947) and *The Crucible* (1953) were protest plays that reflected Miller's liberal idealism. Though his work was decidedly uneven, Tennessee Williams must be viewed as a more important playwright than Miller. Williams brought a passionate poetry 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).

Until the 1960s, Miller and Williams so dominated the postwar theatre that no other playwright emerged to challenge them. Then, in 1962, Edward Albee's reputation was secured by the stunning power of *Who s Afraid of* Virginia Woolf? A master of absurdist theatre, Albee has since emerged as the third major figure in postwar American drama. After the centre of American drama shifted from Broadway to off‑ and off‑off‑Broadway, American playwrights were increasingly free to write radical and innovative plays with some realistic hope of seeing them produced. 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.* Imamu Amiri

Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Ed Bullins inspired an angry black nationalist theatre. Baraka's *Dutchman and the Slave* (1964) communicated anger through experimental techniques, while Bullins' *In the Wine Time* (1968) made use of "street" Iyricism. 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 Pnze for *Buried Child.* Other important new voices in American drama were Lanford Wilson, the 1980 Pulitzer winner for *~alleys Folly* and Ntozake Shange, whose "choreopoem," For *Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow Is Enuf,* moved to Broadway in 1976.

**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. Later, Gore Vidal emerged as a potential heir to Wilson's legacy. Men of Like Wilson, Vidal wrote important literary criticism, fic‑ tion, history, and social commentary. In A *Second Flowering* (1973) and *The Dream of the Golden Mountains* (1980~, Malcolm Cowley investigated the effects of social and political change on 20th‑century American literature. Alfred Kazin wrote literary history *(Bright Book of Life* [1973]) and autobiography *(New York Jew* [1978]); while Irving Howe produced literary theory and social criticism. The iconoclastic literary criticism of Leslie Fiedler was distinguished by its wit and creativity. Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960) remains the most important Freudian study of American literature. Lionel Trilling, in *the Liberal Imagination (* 1950) and other works, rejected V.L. Parrington's concept of literature as social reportage but insisted on its humanistic role. In *The Way of the New World* (1975), Addison Gayle, Jr., defended his theory that black literature must promote a sense of militant nationalism.

Despite the insistence by Wilson, Cowley, Trilling, and others that literature has a social function, the New Criticism of Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks remained a dominant influence in postwar literary studies. In addition, scholars published important biographies of several major American novelists. Leon Edel's exhaustive study of Henry James appeared in five volumes: *Henry James: The Untried Years, 1843‑1870; The Conquest of London 1870‑1881 The Middle Years 1882‑1895; The Treacherous Years 1895‑1901;* and *The Master 1901-1916* (1953‑72). Mark Schorer's *Sinclair Lewis An American Life* (1961). Carlos Baker's *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story* (1969), Michel Fabre's *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright* (1973), and Joseph Blotner's *Faulkner: A Biography* (1974) were uniquely perceptive biographies. The impressive *Harvard Guide to Contemporary American Writing* edited by Daniel Hoffman, appeared in 1979.

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. 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 the first truly detached and honest investigation of the forces behind, and the implications of, the 1960s counterculture. Robert M. Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (1974) defied all classification. In it, Pirsig equated the emotional collapse of his central character with the disintegration of American workmanship and cultural values.

The emergence in academic circles of two sharply contrasting critical movements illustrated the complexity of the time. First, the French‑inspired school of Structuralism reached the United States. Centered primarily at Yale, Structural the American disciples of Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes practiced an abstract criticism based on linguistic and philosophic innovation. For them, criticism often supplanted literature as the focus of attention. In sharp contrast, feminist literary criticism often emphasized the social, even the political, function of literature. Tillie Olsen's *Silences ( 1978)* exemplified a feminist criticism stressing androgyny. (J.R.G.)

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