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American Literature to 1900

Introduction by
Lewis Leary

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AMERICAN LITERATURE

To 1900

INTRODUCTION BY
WARREN FRENCH

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The entry for each writer consists of a biography, a complete list of his published books, a selected list of published bibliographies and critical studies on the writer, and a signed critical essay on his work.

In the biographies, details of education, military service, and marriage(s) are generally given before the usual chronological summary of the life of the writer; awards and honours are given last.

The Publications section is meant to include all book publications, though as a rule broadsheets, single sermons and lectures, minor pamphlets, exhibition catalogues, etc. are omitted. Under the heading Collections, we have listed the most recent collections of the complete works and those of individual genres (verse, plays, novels, stories, and letters); only those collections which have some editorial authority and were issued after the writer's death are listed; on-going editions are indicated by a dash after the date of publication; often a general selection from the writer's works or a selection from the works in the individual genres listed above is included.

Titles are given in modern spelling, though the essayists were allowed to use original spelling for titles and quotations; often the titles are "short." The date given is that of the first book publication, which often followed the first periodical or anthology publication by some time; we have listed the actual year of publication, often different from that given on the title-page. No attempt has been made to indicate which works were published anonymously or pseudonymously, or which works of fiction were published in more than one volume. We have listed plays which were produced but not published; librettos and musical plays are listed along with the other plays; no attempt has been made to list lost or unverified plays. Reprints of books (including facsimile editions) and revivals of plays are not listed unless a revision or change of title is involved. The most recent edited version of individual works is included if it supersedes the collected edition cited.

In the essays, short references to critical remarks refer to items cited in the Publications section or in the Reading List. Introductions, memoirs, editorial matter, etc. in works cited in the Publications section are not repeated in the Reading List.

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INTRODUCTION

"In your rocking-chair, by your window, shall you dream such happiness as you may never feel." Thus ends Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, the first outstanding American novel of the twentieth century, published in 1900, though largely ignored for the next ten years. Dreiser's description of Carrie's fate is uncannily prophetic of what awaits the protagonists of the major American literary works for the next eight decades that we can now recognize as the Age of Modernism. Dreiser brought to a reluctant United States a Modernist sensibility characterized by a feeling of isolation and alienation from an urbanized, mechanized society.

Dreiser was ahead of his time, however, even though he had conceived all of the novels that he would publish – including his Cowperwood trilogy about a corrupt businessman – by 1914. The "pre-Modernists," conventionally labeled "realists," gave up slowly and grudgingly the struggle to dominate American taste with the dogma that William Dean Howells had pronounced – that the writer "can no longer expect to be received on the ground of entertainment only; he assumes a higher function, something like that of a physician or priest," working within established society to adjust the individual to its institutions. While the Modernists were not content, either, only to entertain, they saw themselves as enemies of oppressive social institutions, presenting the individual's only hope as lying in flight.

1. The Age of Innocence, 1900–19

The beginning of the twentieth century was more than an arbitrary chronological dividing line in American literature. Few established writers of the previous century produced significant work after 1900; and the early death of Stephen Crane, who envisioned the individual transcendence of society in *The Red Badge of Courage* and his bitterly ironic poems, deprived us of a key transitional figure. Howells bravely attempted to maintain the status quo in *The Son of Royal Langbrith* (1904); but his subsequent work retreated to the midwest of his own childhood before the Civil War. Mark Twain's writings became so angry and bitter that readers shunned *What Is Man?* (1906) and *The Mysterious Stranger* (1916). Only Henry James produced triumphant curtain calls – *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Golden Bowl* (1904), and *The Ambassadors* (1903), in which Lambert Strether's last eloquent speech – "That, you see, is my only logic. Not, out of the whole affair, to have got anything for myself" – definitively enunciates just as the voices of the pre-Modernists were fading into silence the altruistic principles their age failed to realize in practice.

Except for Booth Tarkington, who offered an indulgent criticism of the middle class in *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1918) and the Penrod stories, the novelists who flourished during the first years of the twentieth century were "muckrakers" concerned about the social breakdown resulting from persons in responsible positions seeking to get everything for themselves. These writers continued, however, to try to work within the Establishment, hoping that it might yet prove capable of reform. *The Thirteenth District* (1902) by Brand Whitlock, who became a reform mayor of Toledo, Ohio, was less successful than David Graham Phillips's exposure of New York City corruption in novels like *Susan Lenox: Her Fall and Rise* (1917). Winston Churchill (no kin to the British political leader) explored such problems against American historical backgrounds in novels like *The Crisis* (1901) and *Coniston* (1906).

By far the most popular and successful of the novelists who indicted American business ethics, however, was Upton Sinclair, whose *The Jungle* (1906) led to reform of the meat-packing industry. Although Sinclair continued to expose corruption for another thirty years

and even ran for governor of California, he never equaled his early success until during World War II when he began a series of eleven novels about a kind of cosmopolitan superhero, Lanny Budd. Most critics, however, found the premise that altruistic and patriotic supermen could take over and redeem the international industrial/military complex old-fashioned.

The Modernist concept of escape began to dominate American writing with the fiction of Jack London. Though presumably a Socialist who predicted the return of a primitive Golden Age following a Fascist revolution in *The Iron Heel* (1908), London praised the Nietzschean superman in *The Sea-Wolf* (1904) and, in his most self-revelatory tale, *Martin Eden* (1909), portrayed a hero driven at last to suicide by the personal and political problems that he sought vainly to solve. George Cabot Lodge's even more bleakly cynical *The Genius of the Commonplace*, suppressed by the Howells consistory and only recently published, dramatizes the disillusionment as the century began of even Boston's traditionalist Brahmin society, as does also the posthumously published *Education of Henry Adams* (1918, privately printed in 1907) by the scholarly scion of one of the nation's most famous families. The collapse of the venerated role of the aristocrat as guardian of public morals finds its ultimate statement in philosopher George Santayana's novel *The Last Puritan* (1935).

The transition to Modernism was made most importantly but much less violently in the works of three distinguished women novelists who tempered their traditional conservatism with an awareness that the past was irretrievable in a changing world. Edith Wharton, one of the few American writers born into the wealthy international set, symbolically provided the name for the period that ended exactly with the appearance of her novel in *The Age of Innocence* (1920), which depicts the cost in human happiness of the rigid rules regulating New York's Victorian society. Earlier, in *The House of Mirth* (1905), she had shown the suicidal cost of attempting to play society's games. Most of her other fiction portrayed ironically international society, except for *Ethan Frome* (1911), which disposed of dreams of primitive virtue by showing how bad things could be in backwoods New England. Ellen Glasgow offered a similarly cheerless picture of another traditional society in her native Virginia.

More complex and most important is the fiction of Willa Cather, which seemed to offer fresh hope in two epic tributes to the passing frontier, *O Pioneers!* (1913) and *My Ántonia* (1918). Later, however, after she made the statement that her world fell apart in 1922 (the year of Eliot's *The Waste Land*), her fiction, especially *A Lost Lady* (1923) and *The Professor's House* (1925), reflected a bitter disillusionment with contemporary materialistic society. Her increasing desire to escape into memories of a more glorious past colors two of her finest works, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927) and *Shadows on the Rock* (1931).

The Modernist sensibility also manifested itself in American poetry almost exactly at the turn of the century, when the genteel influence of New England's "fireside poets" was ebbing. About the only traditional poet active at the turn of the century likely to be anthologized today is William Vaughn Moody, whose "An Ode in Time of Hesitation" (1901) exactly captures in its title the bankruptcy of America's genteel dream in the face of a growing imperialism. Moody's Harvard friends, Trumbull Stickney and George Cabot Lodge, were already sounding in their poetry the notes of alienation and the rejection of American culture that would characterize Modernist expatriate writings; but both men died – like Stephen Crane – early in the century. Even Moody turned principally to drama before his death in 1910.

At first a dark new vision manifested itself in American poetry through the ironic regionalism of Edwin Arlington Robinson's *The Children of the Night* (1897) and Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology* (1915). Robert Frost's *A Boy's Will* (1913) and *North of Boston* (1914) exhibit a wider range of sympathies; but all are unprecedented psychological probings of determined and frustrated villagers and farmers from New England and the Midwest. Vachel Lindsay's attempt to promote "the higher vaudeville" through his "Gospel of Beauty," as exemplified by *General William Booth Enters into Heaven and Other Poems* (1913) also emphasized the use of small town figures and native legendry in a new "public poetry."

The triumph of an urban, cosmopolitan, elitist viewpoint was signaled, however, by the most important event in the development of twentieth-century American poetry, Harriet Monroe's founding in Chicago in 1912 of *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, which still remains the journal in which poets courting recognition wish to be published. An indifferent poet herself, Monroe helped re-establish the Whitman strain in American poetry by her early support of Carl Sandburg's Chicago songs; but her influence was more widely felt when she became allied with the international Imagist movement, led by Bostonian heiress Amy Lowell and her cohort and later bitter foe, Ezra Pound. Pound had removed to Europe in 1908 and had begun to develop an international reputation as a translator; but he was to loom largest when he turned to bitter social criticism after World War I.

The American drama made less progress than other native arts between 1900 and World War I. At the peak of its popularity during these years before it was seriously challenged by the cinema, the American theater was also at the nadir of its never previously very impressive artistic power. Turn of the century audiences favored exotic romantic works produced with elaborate naturalistic scenery, like David Belasco's *Madame Butterfly* (1900) and *The Girl of the Golden West* (1905), which live on as the basis for Puccini's operas. Genteel longings for a theater that combined high art with high seriousness were vainly focused upon William Vaughn Moody's idealistic appeals for human dignity in *The Great Divide* (1906) and *The Faith Healer* (1909) and Percy MacKaye's spectacular historical dramas like *The Scarecrow* (1908). Almost none of the hundreds of American dramas produced between 1900 and 1915 are revived today, even as period curiosities; the event that was to prove the equivalent for American drama of what the founding of *Poetry* magazine had been for American poetry was the establishment in 1915 of the Provincetown Players, which began in 1916 to produce the one-act plays of Eugene O'Neill, subsequently grouped as *The Long Voyage Home*.

Memorable American humor was also in short supply early in the century. Many of Mark Twain's later and bitter works were withheld from the public, while Finley Peter Dunne and George Ade did not repeat their initial successes with folksy humor in *Mr. Dooley in Peace and in War* (1898) and *Fables in Slang* (1900). Vaudeville and film clowns like W. C. Fields, Charlie Chaplin, and the Keystone Cops had taken over.

2. The Triumph of Modernism, 1919-29

Just as the decade of boom and bust really began with the end of World War I, so 1919 also marked the Modernist breakthrough in American fiction with the publication of Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* and James Branch Cabell's *Jurgen*. These were joined the next year by Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise*, Eugene O'Neill's first full-length plays and the collected lyrics of Edna St. Vincent Millay. Above all 1920 brought Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street*, which lambasted the ugliness, complacency and vulgarity of the small Midwestern town and satirized the death of the pioneering spirit. These set the tone for the decade; sympathetic novels about rural America, like R  lvaag's immigrant epic, *Giants in the Earth* (1927), were rare.

Although Anderson's subsequent stories and Cabell's further legends of the mythical Poictesmes were not widely read, Sinclair Lewis became the country's most famous novelist with *Babbitt* (1922), which provided the derogatory tag still attached to the kind of fatuous community booster it depicted; *Arrowsmith* (1925), about the persecution that drives a genuinely idealistic doctor into exile; *Elmer Gantry* (1927), about the hypocritical religious revivalists who save souls for the preacher's profit; and *Dodsworth* (1929), Lewis's first sympathetic international novel about a retired business man who goes abroad to find a decent life. These confirmations of the European intelligentsia's view of the parvenu excesses of the United States led to Lewis's becoming in 1930 the first American to win the Nobel Prize for literature.

None of Lewis's novels so well epitomizes, however, the reaction of a Modernist sensibility to a demoralized United States as F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), which presents Jay Gatsby, born James Gatz, who "springs from his Platonic conception of

himself," as the possessor of "some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life," which in his innocence and ignorance, he puts at "the service of a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty," only to be destroyed by "what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams." Although he became a legendary figure himself, Fitzgerald never matched *The Great Gatsby*. His novel about expatriate society, *Tender Is the Night*, never found its final form; and his tale of Hollywood, *The Last Tycoon*, is only a collection of brilliant fragments.

Fitzgerald's accomplishment in *Gatsby* was not quickly recognized because it was overshadowed in 1925 by the long-awaited publication of Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*. Though the novel does in a way epitomize the decadence of twentieth-century American society by portraying the inexorable way in which the appeal of quick material rewards ultimately destroys an attractive, impressionable, but not too bright youth, readers of a faster-paced age began to lose patience with Dreiser's lumbering style and heavy-handed moralizing.

Fitzgerald's reputation was also for years overshadowed by that of his sometime friend, often bitter foe and critic, the fellow expatriate Ernest Hemingway. Hemingway leaped to fame as the principal spokesman for the "lost generation" in his novels *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), about an aimless group of American expatriates in Europe after World War I, and *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), with its tragic message, set against the background of an Italian retreat during the war, that even the man who wishes to make "a separate peace" is at the mercy of a nature that man's puny dreams cannot control.

Like Hemingway, John Dos Passos began his literary career after serving as an ambulance driver in World War I and became subsequently involved in the Spanish Civil War. His *One Man's Initiation - 1917* (1919) and *Three Soldiers* (1921) rank with *A Farewell to Arms* as the classic American accounts of World War I. Dos Passos then went on to develop the technique of a montage novel in order to present first a cross-section of the chaos of New York City life in *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), and then an epic portrait of the decay of American life and values in the three novels constituting the *U.S.A.* trilogy - *The 42nd Parallel* (1930), *1919* (1932), and *The Big Money* (1936), which portrays the spectacular excesses leading to the stock market crash through a variety of factual and fictional materials.

The famous appellation "lost generation" for those morally disoriented by World War I has been attributed to Gertrude Stein's impatience with a Parisian auto mechanic. Whether or not she can be credited with the phrase, this redoubtable avant-garde writer, an expatriate since 1902, when she began to feel stifled by American conventionality, was the center of the American literary community in France between the World Wars. Her experimental works are also both thematically and formally at the very center of the Modernist tradition because of their attempt, on one hand, to adapt for literary purposes the techniques of the cubist painters like Picasso and, on the other, to portray the pointlessness and frustration of women's lives, from the clearly delineated portrayals of long-suffering women in *Three Lives* (1909) through the mazes of the massive *The Making of Americans* (1925) to the mysterious *Ida* (1941) and her opera librettos like *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1934, with music by Virgil Thomson). Despite the range and variety of her incessant experiments, however, Stein's reputation with the general public rested on *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933), her account of her life with her long-time companion.

Few other expatriates or experimentalists shared her fame. Djuna Barnes is known almost entirely for *Nightwood* (1936), a stream-of-consciousness novel about disturbed people; none of Glenway Wescott's other works enjoyed the popularity of his early *The Grandmothers* (1927), about a pioneering Wisconsin family as seen through the eyes of an expatriate descendant; and the lives of writers like Robert McAlmon, Harry and Caresse Crosby, and Charles Henri Ford remain better known than their works. Not all the uprooted went to Paris. The still mysterious B. Traven (Traven Torsvan?), wrote social protest novels like *The Death Ship* in Mexico for initial publication in Germany. Americans preferred, however, the exoticism of one of Gertrude Stein's friends, Thornton Wilder, whose *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (1927), about an inscrutable tragedy in 18th century Peru, became one best-selling novel of permanent value.

Some writers like Maxwell Bodenheim (*Replenishing Jessica*, 1925) and Carl Van Vechten (*Peter Whiffle*, 1922) simply fled the midwest for Greenwich Village, where they joined poets like E. E. Cummings and Edna St. Vincent Millay in turning out highly stylized and wittily cynical works about the jazz age that are valued today principally as period pieces. Van Vechten, however, achieved a more enduring reputation through his association with the Harlem Renaissance, which he depicted with sympathetic realism in *Nigger Heaven* (1926).

This Harlem Renaissance of the 1920's provided the first serious opportunity for black writers to depict a developing black culture in a black community, in the hope of cultivating a black audience; but their contemporary audiences were largely sympathetic white patrons. Black writers had been producing notable novels since late in the nineteenth century; but the works of Charles W. Chesnutt, like *The Wife of His Youth* (1899), and James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) dealt principally with the problems of light-skinned blacks "passing" for whites to overcome the handicaps of racial prejudices. Encouraged, however, by the freedom of "jazz age" Harlem, blacks like sociologist-educator W. E. B. DuBois and Claude McKay began to produce distinguished novels about the problems of aspiring members of a black community that would be fragmented again by the Depression.

Most striking of these novels was the long-neglected but now much discussed *Cane* (1923) by Jean Toomer, a mysterious figure of uncertain origins who abandoned a promising career to devote himself to the teachings of philosopher Georgi Gurdjieff. A collage of stories, songs, and plays, *Cane* has often been the subject of pointless controversy over its form; what matters is that Toomer uses all the means at his disposal to dramatize the plight of blacks twice alienated both by race and the common neglect of artists in the twentieth century.

Although Langston Hughes has written one of the finest novels about black life, *Not Without Laughter* (1930), he is best known for his stories of a black folk-philosopher, Simple, and the poetry in which he experimented with the use of black folk song and jazz rhythms. Countée Cullen also experimented with lyrical forms in *The Ballad of the Brown Girl* (1927) and *The Black Christ* (1929), but he used traditional English forms and, as Gerald Moore explains, "attacked the whole notion of an American-Negro school of poetry and urged the importance of the Anglo-American poetic tradition upon his fellow black writers."

Cullen's attitude was closely in tune with the most respected poets of the decade who viewed their dissolute period with dismay. Ezra Pound launched the attack in 1920 with his "Mauberley" poems. The opening stanza of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* epitomizes the Modernist poet's state of mind: "For three years, out of key with his time,/He strove to resuscitate the dead art/Of poetry; to maintain 'The sublime'/In the old sense. Wrong from the start —." Pound's increasing displeasure took the form of a long series of "Cantos," collages of miscellaneous erudition drawn from cultures of all times and all places mixed with the rantings against modern economic and political systems that became the substance also of his increasingly frequent prose polemics. While a small cult of ultra-elitists has admired these works hysterically, most readers have found them too cryptic, dogmatic, or offensive. Pound ultimately became much more a political symbol than a poetic force when, after making propaganda broadcasts for Italy's fascist government during World War II, he was arrested for treason and confined for some years in an insane asylum.

Pound's place in the poetic hierarchy was early usurped, however unintentionally, by his major discovery, T. S. Eliot, an American expatriate in London, whose *The Waste Land* (1922) became the most quoted and imitated poem of the century — the high-water mark of the Modernist era. It is entirely possible to take at face value the statement attributed to Eliot that to him the poem was "only the relief of a personal and wholly insignificant grouse against life" and yet to maintain as I have in *The Twenties* that it is "the embodiment of a world-view widely characteristic of thoughtful and sensitive individuals during the 1920s." Eliot's personal protest happened to give voice to the feelings of the sensitive persons of a generally gross age.

Yet, despite the idolization of Eliot, there were vigorous dissenters from his view. Chief among these were Hart Crane and William Carlos Williams, who could only begin to win

proper recognition when Eliot's influence began to wane after World War II. As Donald Pease points out, Hart Crane felt that it was Eliot who had to be transcended in creating *The Bridge* (1930), his "epic of modern consciousness." Although scholars still debate the "unity" of Crane's mystical epic with some finding it only a chaos of fragments like the age it mirrors, others find its vast structure a coherent reinvigoration of the lapsed tradition of Walt Whitman (whom Eliot greatly mistrusted).

Williams even more indignantly protested that "Eliot returned us to the classroom just at the moment when I felt that we were on the point of escape ... to a new art form ... rooted in the locality which should give it fruit." As Robert K. Johnson points out, Williams put forward, against Eliot's increasingly metaphysical concerns, a creed based on the beauty contained in physical reality that is best illustrated by his own epic of the commonplace, *Paterson* (1946-58), based on impressions of his home city in New Jersey.

Another dissenting voice took an even bleaker view than Eliot's of the contemporary world and the entire human experience. Also going against the grain of an age that cultivated principally the brief lyric by writing long blank verse narratives about the forbidding California coast near Big Sur, where he lived, Robinson Jeffers in works like *Tamar* (1924) and *Roan Stallion* (1925) shocked readers with his misanthropic legends of violent, amoral people bent on courses leading to self-destruction.

Although Jeffers considered protest only a bubble "in the molten mass," some surfaced in Greenwich Village in the typographically eccentric satires of E. E. Cummings like "Poem, or Beauty Hurts Mr. Vinal" and "Next to Of Course God America I," which are still unmatched vignettes of empty-headed pomposity. One other New York writer who managed to maintain a unique stability in the midst of madness was Marianne Moore, editor of the revived *The Dial* (1926-29), who persisted throughout the years in viewing poets as "liberators of the imagination."

A once enormously admired poem that has been virtually forgotten over a half century is Stephen Vincent Benét's *John Brown's Body* (1928), an epic account of the Civil War from a Union point of view. Americans have lost their taste for historical epics, for the fate of Benét's work was shared by Archibald MacLeish's narration of Cortez's conquest of Mexico, *Conquistador* (1932), though MacLeish's shorter "Ars Poetica" has continued to be regarded, perhaps wrongly, as a statement of the Modernist aesthetic, just as his much anthologized "You, Andrew Marvell" sums up a cyclical theory of destiny.

The United States developed a drama of truly international importance for the first time in the 1920's in the plays of Eugene O'Neill, whose first full-length offering in New York, *Beyond the Horizon* (1920), carried off the Pulitzer Prize. O'Neill won two more Pulitzer Prizes during the decade for *Anna Christie* (1921) and *Strange Interlude* (1928) and presented four other major productions in New York during the decade. While all his plays are Modernist statements of the need of individuals to escape the deadly constraints of monotonous lives or oppressive institutions, they are written in two strikingly different styles. While some are sombre dramas of personal frustration in the prevailing naturalistic mode of the period (*Beyond the Horizon*, *Desire under the Elms*), others are practically the only important American examples of the European Expressionist drama that sought to suggest interior states of mind through stylized sets and actions (*The Emperor Jones*, *The Hairy Ape*, *The Great God Brown*). In his greatest triumph during his lifetime, the nine-act *Strange Interlude*, he combined naturalistic action with expressionist revelation through a double set of speeches that allow the audience to hear both what the characters are saying and what they are thinking.

Most of even the other Pulitzer prize-winning plays of the decade pale beside O'Neill's work. The few foreshadowings of a generally brilliant decade ahead included Sidney Howard's *The Silver Cord* (1926), an archetypal picture of a mother fixation, and the only other important American expressionist play besides O'Neill's, Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine* (1923), a devastating picture of dehumanization. Audiences enjoyed especially, however, two rollicking farces that caught the bumptious pseudo-sophisticated tone of the decade, Maxwell Anderson and Laurence Stallings's *What Price Glory?* (1924) and Ben Hecht

and Charles MacArthur's *The Front Page* (1926). But the biggest hit of all was Anne Nichols's ethnic farce, *Abie's Irish Rose* (1922).

American humor generally made a great comeback during years of careless laughter. H. L. Mencken had been delighting the "smart set" with his iconoclastic attacks on the "booboisie" and defenses of American authors like Theodore Dreiser since 1914; but he and the outrageous drama critic George Jean Nathan scored their greatest successes after founding *The American Mercury* in 1924. Its cynical wit was soon overshadowed by that of *The New Yorker*, founded in 1925 by editor Harold Ross, "not for the old lady in Dubuque." The magazine attracted the sophisticated funsters who became members of the Algonquin Round Table (named for the hotel where they met for lunch) – James Thurber, poet and short-story writer Dorothy Parker, essayist E. B. White, monologist Robert Benchley, popular book reviewer Alexander Woollcott. They did not have the New York scene to themselves, however, for even more popular were the ironically comic short stories of Ring Lardner (*The Big Town*, 1921) and the poems that Don Marquis attributed to a newspaper-office cockroach madly in love with a fickle cat (*Archy and Mehitable*, 1927).

3. Alienation Vindicated – Depression and World War, 1929–45

If American writings of the 1920's were not equalled in brilliance by those of the 1930's, they were surpassed in profundity by the outpouring of moving responses to the human condition inspired by the international depression and the rise to power of the authoritarian regimes that precipitated World War II.

Apparently traumatized by the end of the world they had known, few established American novelists matched their earlier accomplishments after 1929. Sinclair Lewis's satirical portraits of pretentious Americans began to resemble comic strips. Only *It Can't Happen Here* (1935), a warning about the possibility of a fascist takeover by popular demagogues in the United States, and *Kingsblood Royal* (1947), an early attack on anti-Negro prejudice outside the South, won great attention, but even these were overstated, two-dimensional tracts. After publishing *U.S.A.*, John Dos Passos became embittered by his experiences with both sides in the Spanish Civil War and became increasingly a right-wing isolationist stressing the American values of the founding fathers. The Spanish Civil War, however, brought Ernest Hemingway out of a long slump to find a new voice in praising the individual whose dreams exceed the squalid possibilities of the world about him in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) and again in his very popular fable, *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952).

The most enduring novelists of the 1930's, however, were those who found their inspirations rooted in their localities, as William Carlos Williams had hoped poets would. After making a false start with the stylized history of a pirate (*Cup of Gold*, 1929), John Steinbeck found his locality in the rural valleys of central California in the mystical *To a God Unknown* (1933) and the ironic story-cycle *The Pastures of Heaven* (1932). After revealing a gift for humorous allegory in *Tortilla Flat* (1935) and naturalistic tragedy (*Of Mice and Men*, 1937), he published what both public and critics have acclaimed as the greatest work of American social protest since *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1938), a novel about the sufferings of the dispossessed "Okies" from the Dust Bowl on Highway 66 and in an unfriendly California, in which his hitherto morbidly Modernist irony gives way to a transcendent faith in the ultimate triumph of simple people. Also noteworthy are his story-cycle of a boy's coming of age after the passing of the frontier in a diminished America, *The Red Pony* (1937), and his denunciation of middle-class smugness and praise of "outcasts" in his tribute to his friend Ed Ricketts, *Cannery Row* (1945).

The long depressed South, however, was the region that would really experience a Renaissance while long-favored lands sank into lethargy. Beginning in 1929 with *Look Homeward, Angel*, Thomas Wolfe turned the memories of his childhood in Asheville, North Carolina, and his adult journeyings throughout this country and in Europe into epic fiction, especially in *Of Time and the River* (1935). Erskine Caldwell devastatingly satirized the rednecks of the Southern backwoods in *Tobacco Road* (1932) and *God's Little Acre* (1933),

while Elizabeth Madox Roberts paid tribute to the heroically sacrificial life of the pioneers in Kentucky in *The Great Meadow* (1930). The most important southern writer of this period, however, a figure of international stature, was William Faulkner.

After an unpromising start in two "jazz age" novels influenced by Sherwood Anderson, Faulkner found his "little postage stamp of territory" in Yoknapatawpha County, modeled on the region where he lived in the red clay hills of northeast Mississippi. In *Sartoris* (1929), he relates a late chapter in the history of the aristocratic family that becomes the foil for the upstart, white trash Snopeses, whose tale is told in the trilogy *The Hamlet* (1940), *The Town* (1957), and *The Mansion* (1959). Other novels and short stories, including his four supreme achievements – *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), *As I Lay Dying* (1930), *Light in August* (1932) and *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) – fill in the story, pieces of which have been brilliantly arranged into a chronological history by Malcolm Cowley in *The Portable Faulkner*. The typical Modernist concept that underlies the whole cycle of the human loss of innocence that accompanies the destruction of the wilderness comes into sharpest focus in two companion stories of the *Go Down, Moses* cycle (1942) – "The Bear," in which the isolated Ike McCaslin protests greedy man's destruction of his bond with nature, and "Delta Autumn," in which a dying Ike thinks to himself, "No wonder the ruined woods I used to know don't cry for retribution. . . . The people who have destroyed it will accomplish its revenge."

Perhaps inspired by Faulkner's example, James Agee paid what remains the most sympathetic tribute to the hard life of Southern poor whites in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), and Southern fiction flourished as never before. Four women novelists made especially distinguished contributions to the movement. Caroline Gordon was directly associated with the influential Southern agrarian poets and in novels from *Penhally* (1931) to *The Malefactors* (1956) a most outspoken critic of the region's departure from its traditional culture, as was her husband, Allen Tate, in his one novel, *The Fathers* (1938). More impressive, however, were Katherine Anne Porter's tales of her native Texas, like *Noon Wine* (1937), and of Mexico. Late in the period the changing life in small Southern rural communities became the subjects of stories by Carson McCullers and Eudora Welty. McCullers published her first novel, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* in 1940, and Welty's fantastic novelette *The Robber Bridegroom* appeared in 1942. McCullers, however, quickly reached the peak of her career with her third novel, *The Member of the Wedding* (1946) and her play version of it (1950), while Welty did not produce her most ambitious work, *Losing Battles*, until 1970. The most popular novel ever to come out of the South, however, was Margaret Mitchell's mammoth *Gone with the Wind* (1936), a mythical evocation of life in the plantation South during the Civil War that was made into what has remained the country's favorite motion picture.

The fiction that bulked largest, however, in the United States during the depression years was the work of the "tough guy" proletarian writers. The most prolific of these, James T. Farrell was never able to equal the success of his first naturalistic stories about growing up on Chicago's South Side, the *Studs Lonigan* trilogy (1932–35), and many other prolific writers of the time like Josephine Herbst have been largely forgotten. Edward Dahlberg proved an exception when he developed a belated reputation for the autobiographical *Because I Was Flesh* (1964). James M. Cain, however, won a wide following for his tales of the seedy elements of society in glamorous Southern California like *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934) and *Double Indemnity* (1943).

The grimmest work about decadent movieland, however, was Nathanael West's hallucinatory prediction of the destruction of Los Angeles, *The Day of the Locust* (1939), which followed his other powerful indictments of the American myth of the self-made man (*A Cool Million*, 1934) and the Christ complex developed by an advice-to-the-lovelorn columnist (*Miss Lonelyhearts*, 1933). Another cynical attack on the shoddiness of American middle-class values was John O'Hara's *Appointment in Samarra* (1934). The most outrageous novels about the period, however, were Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* (1934) and *Tropic of Capricorn* (1939), curious melanges of turgid philosophizing and explicit pornography that were banned from this country for decades until they were the subject of a court battle in the 1960's.

When in 1865 the Civil War was over, literature in the United States took new directions. Before 1860 it had derived almost entirely from its eastern seaboard. But after the war as the country expanded westward, new voices rose. Though the older poets – Longfellow, Lowell, Whittier, and Whitman, and, though unheard, Emily Dickinson also – still wrote, the new literature of the later decades of the century was largely in prose, much of it about sections of the expanding country seldom written of before. Bret Harte presented in “The Luck of Roaring Camp” (1868) and “The Outcasts of Poker Flat” (1869) frontier types in the mine fields of California. John Hay’s *Pike County Ballads* (1871) presented dialect verse accounts of the Illinois frontier, George Washington Cable in *Old Creole Days* (1879) introduced bilingual Louisiana, and Joel Chandler Harris told stories of plantation life in Georgia in *Uncle Remus* (1881) and its popular sequels. Mary Noailles Murfree as Charles Egbert Craddock wrote of people in *The Tennessee Mountains* (1884). Thomas Nelson Page wrote sentimentally of plantation life in *Ole Virginia* (1887). New England rural life was revealed in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Oldtown Folks* (1869), in Mary E. Wilkins Freeman’s *A New England Nun* (1891), and with greater artistry in Sarah Orne Jewett’s *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896). Lafcadio Hearn, meticulously a stylist, wrote descriptive sketches of urban Ohio, of New Orleans, most effectively in *Chita* (1889), then of the West Indies, and finally of Japan.

These people who revealed uncommon characters in simple, often romantic situations in areas not well known to ordinary readers have been called local colorists. Closely linked to them were novelists often intent on reform like Rebecca Harding Davis, whose *Margaret Hough* (1862) reveals sordidness in the life of a northern mill town, much as Albion W. Tourgée in *A Fool’s Errand* (1879) and *Bricks Without Straw* (1880) reveals problems in rebuilding the war-torn south, as do John William De Forest in *Miss Ravenel’s Conversion from Secession to Loyalty* (1867) and Constance Fenimore Woolson in *Rodman the Keeper* (1880). Life in the middle west was realistically presented by Edward Eggleston in *The Hoosier School-Master* (1871), by Edgar W. Howe in *The Story of a Country Town* (1883), and with some bitterness by Joseph Kirkland in *Zury, The Meanest Man in Spring County* (1887). Helen Hunt Jackson’s *Ramona* (1884) is a romantic tale of Spaniards and Indians in southern California. James Lane Allen in *A Kentucky Cardinal* (1895) and *The Choir Invisible* (1897) wrote of local scenes sentimentally in beautifully cadenced prose. For in spite of what has been called the rise of realism in the late nineteenth century, romance, sentimentality, and optimism stalwartly held their own, in the dozens of exemplary tales by Horatio Alger, each proving that indeed, in America, goodness and diligence inevitably bring success, in Timothy Shay Arthur’s horrendous experiences in *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room* (1854), in Margaret Finley’s guide to obedience and good manners in *Elsie Dinsmore* (1867), in Louisa May Alcott’s happy family accounts in *Little Women* (1868) and its popular sequels, and in Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886) who represented, in contradistinction to Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*, everything that every good boy should be. From the 1880’s well into the twentieth century Francis Marion Crawford, Edgar Saltus, and many another provided in romance the thrill and chill of escape to adventure.

Though the theater remained active, not only in larger cities, but increasingly in smaller towns visited by travelling companies, few plays of lasting interest were produced during the nineteenth century. Samuel Woodworth, better known for his song of “The Old Oaken Bucket” (1823), and James Nelson Barker wrote now forgotten plays with native settings, while John Howard Payne, whose major claim to fame is his nostalgic song “Home, Sweet Home” (1823), wrote equally unremembered romantic drama with settings abroad. Everyone flocked to see dramatizations of *Rip Van Winkle* and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, each done with melodramatic flair. Augustus Daly produced melodramas like *Under the Gaslight* (1867), problem plays like *Divorce* (1871), and romantic dramas of the West, like *Horizon* (1871). Later in the century audiences seemed satisfied with the timely though quite undistinguished society-orientated dramas of Bronson Howard and Clyde Fitch. The slapstick comedy of the minstrel show delighted many audiences.

For native American humor, present since the jocularities of Franklin and Ebenezer Cooke, surged toward popularity at mid-century. Seba Smith had used rustic New England

dialect in detailing the adventures of *Major Jack Downing* (1833). Augustus B. Longstreet's sketches in *Georgia Scenes* (1835) had told of raucous backcountry shenanigans, as had James G. Baldwin's in *Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi* (1853). Johnson Jones Hooper in *Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs* (1845) had revealed pécadilloes of a backwoods gambler in the old southwest, and James Russell Lowell had moved beyond conventional verse in *The Biglow Papers* (1848–62) turning dialect and humor to the service of politics and reform. Fabulous tales were told of Mike Fink, the riverboat man, and of Paul Bunyan, the giant lumberjack. Thomas Bangs Thorpe's whopper about "The Big Bear of Arkansas" (1841) became a classic among native tall tales. George Washington Harris had great fun in detailing the often scandalous misadventures of that "nat'ral born durn'd fool" *Sut Lovingood* (1867). David Ross Locke as Petroleum V. Nasby distorted grammar and spelling in presenting the escapades of a renegade clergyman in *The Nasby Papers* (1864). Henry Wheeler Shaw as *Josh Billings* (1865) poked down-to-earth good-natured fun at backsliding in politics, home-life, and morals. None was more popular than Charles Farrar Browne who as Artemus Ward captured the fancy of the public, especially as a lecturer whose laconic humor brought both fame and fortune. It was he who started Mark Twain in the same profitable business.

For dominating the latter years of the nineteenth century were three men beside whom most of these others may seem Lilliputian indeed. Samuel Clemens came roaring in from the west as Mark Twain, to take the country by storm. William Dean Howells, a more precise man from Ohio, moved into New England and then New York to take over from native sons command of their literary establishments. Henry James, born to wealth in the East and largely educated abroad, did most of his writing in England. Clemens and James can be thought to represent extremes, in vulgar terms one proudly plebeian, the other with equal pride patrician. As far as is known, they never met, nor did either comment more than casually on the writings of the other. Howells stood in the middle, friend and counsellor to both. That was characteristic of Howells, to be a middleman, neither too far out nor in too deep. Each of these three continued in activity and influence into the twentieth century when Clemens was an embittered scold and James was read with decreasing enthusiasm, but when Howells was esteemed, except by younger men who thought him to have been too long in office, as the dean of American letters.

Samuel Clemens become Mark Twain, had there ever been another like him? Mountebank and sage, he played a part, and provided himself costume and legend to create an image unique. Journeyman printer, steamboat pilot, speculator, journalist, raconteur, world traveller, a man of few ties and little apparent literary ambition, except as literature secured worldly comfort, he seemed specially favored by fortune. Quite by chance his "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" (1865), written in California at the suggestion of Artemus Ward, took the East by storm, and when the letters that he wrote as a newspaper correspondent on a cruise ship to the Mediterranean were gathered as *The Innocents Abroad* (1869), his reputation was secure, his profitable career as a public lecturer guaranteed to keep audiences roar with laughter well underway. He ventured first into the novel in collaboration with Charles Dudley Warner in *The Gilded Age* (1873), a light-handed exposé of political and economic chicanery, which gave name to the era in which Mark Twain, and many another an entrepreneur, flourished. Then he certified himself as a novelist in his own right with *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), *The Prince and the Pauper* (1881), and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), stories designed to appeal to readers of almost every age. He wrote popular books of travel in humorously peculiar countries like England, Germany, and South Africa, and a nostalgic account of his *Life on the Mississippi* (1883). In *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894) and *The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg* (1900) he wrote again of varieties of human corruption. But his single masterwork is *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), the book with which Ernest Hemingway was later to testify all American literature begins. This saga of a boy at war with his conscience as he floats down a great river tells much of Samuel Clemens and his time, but even more of conditions that face people, inevitably conscience-ridden, at any time.

Mark Twain's genius was in control of language, colloquial and formal, and in a view of the world as a place roiled by the sometimes well-meaning misdeeds of people. As he grew older, he pointed with increasing despair, less lightened by humor, at the hideous malefactions of what he called, not without affection, the damned human race. To his friend Howells, however, people seemed susceptible to redemption, and he wrote some forty novels to demonstrate that human decency might somehow prevail. There are no large heights nor great depths in Howells's writings, not in the fiction, the plays, the essays, the travel books, or the occasional poems that for more than half a century he diligently produced. He pleaded for realism in literature. Life should be presented as neither worse nor better than it is. He was wholly dedicated, a good man, interested in social causes and, however despairing he may sometimes seem in private correspondence, confident in his public statements that right will prevail.

A generous man, as editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* from 1871 to 1881 Howells encouraged many new young writers, notably the local colorists. His moving to New York when his term of editorship was over provided a visible sign that that city had replaced Boston as the literary capital of the nation. There as elder statesman, he continued as patron and advisor to young men like Stephen Crane, Hamlin Garland, and Frank Norris who ventured even farther than he in realistic detail. His own novels *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885) and *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1889) are worthy of shelfroom beside any of America's best. They are books to which the historian may turn in confidence to learn how people lived and spoke in those late Victorian times.

To some Henry James is without question America's foremost writer of fiction, who in depth of perception and subtle skill with words produced more novels of excellence than any other. They would argue that while Hawthorne, Melville, and even Mark Twain are remembered, each for one superlatively fine book, James is represented by perhaps half a dozen or more of equal excellence. Each admirer will set forth his own favorites, but most will agree that in, at very least, *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), *The Aspern Papers* (1888), and the three novels representative of what has been called his major phase, *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Ambassadors* (1903), and *The Golden Bowl* (1904), he reached heights unscaled before. Each of these examines Americans in Europe, faced with a culture different from their own, to which they become victims or over which they triumph. Others may prefer his two principal novels with American settings, *Washington Square* (1881) and *The Bostonians* (1886). Still others, however, consider James an unmitigated bore, only to be tolerated in his early, more simply devised stories of *The American* (1877) or *Daisy Miller* (1879).

There is little action, still less of overt adventure in the writings of Henry James. His interest is in the friction of personality on personality, and in the complications that arise when several distinct personalities grope toward understanding of the complex relationships that bind them together or keep them apart. Specifically, his concern was with the culture, the fine things in manners and art, that Europe offered, and how they might be received, assimilated, or rejected by intelligent representatives of the new America where culture, when it existed, was borrowed or bought. Most of his Americans do well, whether trapped within or rising above inherited transatlantic patterns. Decency and honesty override tradition, so that James, for all his foreign settings and subtle discriminations, can be thought of, as much as Walt Whitman, as a champion of the probity and promise of his countrymen.

As the century ended, new writers appeared, some of whom, like Hamlin Garland, who in *Main-Travelled Roads* (1891) began presentation of hardships of Iowa and South Dakota farm life, and Henry Blake Fuller, who in *The Cliff-Dwellers* (1893) told a story of romance and intrigue in a Chicago skyscraper, would write as well into the twentieth century. As would Harold Frederic, who in *The Damnation of Theron Ware* (1896) told of the downfall of a well-intentioned but misguided young clergyman, and S. Weir Mitchell whose historical romances like *Hugh Wynne*, *Free Quaker* (1897) made him long a popular favorite. Robert Herrick began a novel-writing career that would extend for more than thirty years with *The Man Who Wins* (1897) and *The Gospel of Freedom* (1898), introducing an increasingly

pessimistic view of the inevitable influence of capitalism and political corruption on well-meaning people. Ambrose Bierce, newspaper man and iconoclast, leapt to prominence with short narratives of horror and suspense in *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* (1891), setting a standard that he would not quite reach again. Encouraged by Howells, Norwegian-born H. H. Boyesen in *The Golden Calf* (1892) wrote of the downfall of a young man in search of easy wealth. Needing encouragement from no one, the populist reformer Ignatius Donnelly in *Caesar's Column* (1890) looked with jaundiced eye toward the twentieth century when the rich would get richer and the poor poorer.

These were all respectable writers, popular in the best sense. But as the nineteenth century moved toward a close fresh new voices arose, harbingers each of better things. Frank Norris at twenty-one published a long romantic poem, *Yvernelle: A Legend of Feudal France* (1891). But then, first influenced by Emile Zola and later encouraged by Howells, he turned abruptly to realism of the starkest kind. He is sometimes held forth as America's first naturalistic novelist, secured in certainty that people were playthings of fate. His first attempt at fiction of this kind was *Vandover and the Brute*, a gruesome tale of moral disintegration, not published until 1914, twelve years after its author's death. In *Moran of the Lady Letty* (1898) naturalism skirts close to melodrama in a lurid tale of violence and intrigue in adventure at sea. *McTeague* (1899), though tinged with melodrama also, presents a more effective account of how greed and inexperience, and the inexorable hand of fate, can lead to the destruction of people of good intentions. Norris's brief career came to a climax with the publication of *The Octopus* (1901) and then, posthumously, of *The Pit* (1903), novels which he had intended to be part of a trilogy (the final volume to be called *The Wolf*) that would tell of the problems in growing, the chicanery in selling, and, in the third volume, the consumption of American wheat in poverty-stricken Europe. For all his early accomplishment, Norris remains one of the great might-have-beens of American fiction. In *The Responsibilities of the Novelist* (1903), a volume put together after his death the year before, he gives stalwart indication that had he lived he would certainly have seriously contended for success.

Even younger than he, and with a career more brief, was Stephen Crane, who brought a new dimension to the realism of his contemporaries. At twenty-two he borrowed money to pay for the publication of *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets* (1893); it found few readers, but with it modern American fiction was born. With great economy in words, with impressionistic imagery, and with tremendous sympathy Crane presented the fateful circumstances that propelled an attractive innocent toward degradation and destruction. No reinforcement of commentary was necessary. Crane's images created a panoramic backdrop against which characters, often as if in pantomime, moved toward predestined ends. Crane saw with a poet's eye. His own verse as presented in *The Black Riders* (1895) and *War Is Kind* (1899) seemed stark indeed to a generation nourished on Longfellow and Whittier, and responding to the whimsical songs of Eugene Field, the nostalgic sentimentalities of James Whitcomb Riley, and invitations to romantic adventure in Richard Hovey's *Songs from Vagabondia* (1894). Crane's were sharp cryptic poems, stark in imagery, suggesting acquaintance with the poems of Emily Dickinson that had been publicly revealed only five years before, and with them pointing toward the imagist movement that would rise in America a quarter of a century later.

The Red Badge of Courage (1895) is Crane's best known, most often discussed novel. Some critics have placed it beside Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Melville's *Moby-Dick*, and James's *The Portrait of a Lady* as among the best produced in America's nineteenth century. It is a story of war, of the advance and retreat of armies, in which a young man faces death, first with terror but finally with assurance that a person can accept and withstand, however briefly, its awesome inevitability. But Crane's health, never robust, broke after service as a war correspondent in Cuba and Greece during the later 1890's, and he spent his later years in Europe, closely associated with Henry James and Joseph Conrad. During the remaining years of his active career, he wrote a dozen further volumes of fiction or reminiscence, none of which was completely a popular or artistic success. But his short stories "The Blue Hotel,"