

**four
postwar
american
novelists**

**bellow
mailer
barth and
pynchon**

frank d.
mc connell

the
university
of chicago
press

chicago and
london

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

McConnell, Frank D 1942-
Four postwar American novelists.

Includes index.

1. American fiction—20th century—History and criticism. I. Title.

PS379.M253 813'.5'409 76-25638
ISBN 0-226-55684-0

The University of Chicago Press,
Chicago 60637
The University of Chicago Press, Ltd.,
London

© 1977 by The University of Chicago
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Printed in the United States of America
82 81 80 79 78 98765432

acknowledgments

This book was written with the support of a grant from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. It is a pleasure to thank the foundation, and Gordon Ray, its director, for their generosity.

Without the kindness and counsel of a number of friends and colleagues—Alfred Appel, Jr., Harold Bloom, Samuel L. Hynes, Marcus Klein, Keith Cushman, A. Robert Lee, and Arthur Mizener—whatever is of value in this book probably would not be there. My wife, finally, to whom the book is dedicated, has not only supported and encouraged the writing from its inception, but has made even the most difficult moments of its composition not only bearable, but happy.

introduction: after apocalypse

This book is an examination of the fiction of four American novelists of the post-World War II era: Saul Bellow, Norman Mailer, John Barth, and Thomas Pynchon. These four seem to me important not only because of their individual brilliance, but because, among them, they appear to signal something like a renaissance in American fiction: a period equal in its promise and achievement to the efflorescence of Hawthorne, Melville, and Whitman, or to the great early years of Hemingway, Faulkner, and Fitzgerald. But their importance, and the importance of the age they represent and define, is also allied to a crucial phase in the evolution of modern literature generally. For these writers, in my reading at least, mark a watershed in the history of the “modern sensibility” as an imaginative, political, and ultimately spiritual reality. This is the history not only of writing, but of the indispensable subtext and pretext of writing, the way we live our lives and attempt to make sense of those lives. The apocalypse referred to in the title of this chapter is, in the historical scheme, that of World War II and its aftermath and, in the imaginative scheme, that of the whole corrosive tradition of self-consciousness, imaginative despair, and terminal isolation of the single self which is our visionary inheritance from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is my contention that the writers I discuss—and their colleagues in America and Europe—are definitively “post-Apocalyptic” novelists, since their fictions, carefully examined, represent not so much a continuation of the early modernist vision of imagination and society, but rather a re-

version from that vision, literally a revision of the modern context, an attempt to locate, within the very center of the contemporary wasteland, mythologies of psychic survival and social, political health.

To suggest such an interpretation of the fiction of the last thirty years is, I am aware, to risk a charge of heresy, or worse, stupidity. Whatever the critical establishment may make of the relative merits of our most important poets and novelists, there is, at least, general agreement that we are living in an age of the apocalyptic imagination and that those fictions which touch us most intimately are the images of the disintegration of Western culture and society which goes on, every day, around us. In fact, one of the most intelligent and capacious studies of modernism, Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending*, distinguishes between "early" and "contemporary" modernism precisely in terms of the more traditional, moralistic tendencies of the former. According to Kermode, the early modernists—Eliot, Joyce, Yeats, and, one could add, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner—were men for whom the debacle of World War I spelled an end to the self-assured creativity of Western civilization, and who reacted against that disaster by producing visions of the world's end which all, in one way or another, found an antidote to universal decay in visions involving a retreat to myth and "traditional" faith (Eliot's Christianity, Faulkner's Gothicism, Hemingway's sportsman-ethic). But, according to Kermode, the second phase of modernism, the contemporary phase defined by writers like Jean Genet in France and William Burroughs in America, is marked by its complete and even joyful acceptance of the fact of apocalypse, without recourse to any of the traditional, quasi-religious beliefs which might moderate it or assimilate it to the larger history of Western writing and mythmaking.

Kermode's argument is a strong one and has been echoed, with less erudition but considerably more proselytizing enthusiasm, by critics like Susan Sontag, George Steiner, and Richard Poirier. What Sontag calls the aesthetics of "style as radical will," Steiner the "Pythagorean genre" in fiction, and Poirier the art of the "performing self," are all, finally, versions of the same theory. The direction of contemporary writing (according to this theory) is toward a radical, revolutionary redefinition of the idea of human personality and human freedom whose final effect will—or should—be to dissolve the ancient strictures with which society binds the individual and to liberate us all into a free-form, guiltless celebration of the life of the senses, of self-conscious delight unencumbered by the weight

of that ancient albatross, the rationalistic, critical spirit. This interpretation finds perhaps its fullest expression in two recent books, Norman O. Brown's *Closing Time* and John Vernon's *The Garden and the Map: Schizophrenia in Twentieth-Century Literature and Culture*. Both books are prophetic celebrations of Now, vatic assertions that the centuries-old tradition of Western thought and writing is fast approaching an end and about to give birth to a new era of blessedly un- or antirational thinking and behaving. Their methods of arguing this conclusion are interestingly complementary.

In *Closing Time*, Brown is out for very big game, indeed. "It is the way towards the unification of the human race," he writes on the last page, not only writing about apocalypse, but writing apocalyptically. For *Closing Time* is not only about the end and beginning of a Joycean-Viconian cycle, it is the closing of the time, a work of experimental prose which seeks to incarnate the vision it describes. Comes the Revolution, of course, the first thing to go will be the old-fashioned, sustained voice of critical discourse. So Brown writes a book in which he hardly talks at all. His primary texts for the new history are Vico's *New Science* and Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. *Closing Time* consists mainly of long quotations from Vico and Joyce (and short ones from *King Lear*, Marx, Bob Dylan, and the *New York Times*) interspersed with Brown's own connecting observations, *aperçus*, and sibylline etymologies. By cutting out and folding in the mythography of Joyce and Vico, Brown tries to map the "delineaments of giants," the shape of things to come as one age ends and another—of Dionysiac celebration, the new barbarism, the creative vulgarity of the un- or antieducated young—begins. It may be a noble enterprise, but it is one which here falls short of its goal. The effect, rather, is of a throwaway book, a *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* for intellectuals.

The Garden and the Map is a much more infuriating, exasperating book than *Closing Time*, largely because it argues the same premises as Brown's book, but argues them within the conventions of ordinarily discursive literary criticism. The central thesis of *The Garden and the Map* is not only totally subsumed in the title, but borrowed wholecloth from R. D. Laing, Géza Róheim, and the "Freudian left." Western civilization—since Thales, but especially since Descartes and Newton—is, for Vernon, a mode of vision which divides the world into "subject" and "object," "I" and "other," and which is, then, radically schizophrenic. Schizophrenia, moreover, is described as a disease which exiles man from the Garden, the primal scene of at-oneness with the world and himself, into the Map,

landscape as divided, abstracted, “othered.” But, argues Vernon, this period of exile is nearing its end. We are approaching a new fiction and poetry—a literature which, adopting and assuming the patterns of association and perception common to infants and schizophrenics, returns us to the perceptions of the Garden.

In an academic atmosphere which still, largely, assumes that “modern literature” ends somewhere between *The Secret Agent* and *Tender is the Night*, one should perhaps be grateful for any voices that insist that until we come to terms with the likes of Barth and Pynchon, we are functionally illiterate. But we are also illiterate if we have to jettison Descartes, Milton, or Jane Austen—or feel we have to—in order to read Pynchon. My quarrel with Brown, Vernon, et. al. is simply that I feel their battles for the contemporary are Pyrrhic. We do not need to excoriate the tradition out of which the modern arises or to publicly excoriate ourselves for having loved Pope, Stendhal, or Browning, in order to turn the contemporary to human use. And books which do reject what has gone before seem to me jejune, a betrayal of the best impulses of contemporary writing itself.

For two centuries now we have been told that each of us inhabits a private, fictive, “inauthentic” universe and that shared neuroses are the mortar of civilization. But the task of consciousness remains the construction of civilization, not creative play with the mortar itself, leading to the construction of clever and pointless sandcastles. I remember a rural fundamentalist student of mine who exclaimed, after I had spent an hour in class trying to justify the vision of Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*, “Crazy is ugly. And God don’t like ugly.”

Unless we can recognize the wisdom of that comment, I think we miss much of the real point of the best fiction and poetry of the last seventy years—and particularly we miss the value of the torturous history of American fiction since World War II. God—if He is there—may or may not like ugly. But it is certain that our most indispensable writers don’t like it. Their struggles with the omnipresence of the lie and with the inevitable quotation marks around *truth* are—must be—for something more than the mere celebration of a reversion to vatic barbarism or the dubious glories of self-indulgent fantasy.

There is an old joke about the painter whose works were all mad-deningly abstract, but who always signed his name with perfect realism. We do expect abstract paintings to be signed realistically, not as an ironic undercutting of the artist’s intent, but as a guarantee—almost as a social contract—that the art, however personal, is

what all art must be, a transaction between the creating individual and his society: not only a thing *done*, but a thing *meant*. And in the same way, a work of fiction, however convoluted or fantastic it is, however much it violates the norms (very recent norms, actually) of "realistic" narrative, delights or touches us because it, too, is a transaction, a political fact as well as an aesthetic one, an utterance that by its very nature not only relates to, but constitutes the civilized and civilizing society out of which it is generated.

To say this much, of course, is simply to observe that all art, and especially all linguistic art, is inescapably, essentially, social and political—a truism, but a truism that bears repeating in the critical, if not the artistic, climate of the age. All four of the writers examined in this book are acutely concerned with the nature and origins of contemporary neurosis and depression. They are especially concerned with what I believe to be the besetting disease of contemporary man: his conviction of *inauthenticity*—his sense that he has no real self, no real identity, no real creative life amid the conflicting tensions with which urban life surrounds him. And two of the writers I discuss, Norman Mailer and Thomas Pynchon, have been closely identified, by many of their most enthusiastic readers, with the cult of irrationality and (in Kermode's terminology) joyful apocalypticism—with the program, that is, of willed dementia as a cure for the inauthentic condition. But there is an immense difference between the irrational as state of mind and the irrational as fictive possibility or as metaphor. The difference between the schizophrenic fantasies of a mental patient, however complex or elaborate they may be, and Pynchon's myth of a gigantic, world-wide network of persecution and dehumanization in *Gravity's Rainbow* is this: the patient *lives* the insanity of his world, while Pynchon (insofar as he writes *Gravity's Rainbow*) *means* the insanity of his. And that act of *meaning* what you write, seeing what you write as something which is *written*, separates you immeasurably from the trap of simply living in your own words. Why else do our best novelists spend so much time writing about characters who think that they are entrapped in their own fictions if not to indicate (for us and, perhaps, for themselves) the way out of that trap? My fantasies, once I recognize them as fantasies, cease to be my fantasies: they become, instead, the realities of my most problematic level of existence, and my mature burden.

What I am suggesting is a revision of our current view of the modern tradition, and especially a revision of our view of the last thirty years or so in American fiction. The hierarchy of traditional social

and moral values, the sense of cultural consolidation, are of course absent from twentieth-century fiction, from *Ulysses* to *Gravity's Rainbow*. But they are absent in just the way the criminal may be absent from a detective story. It is an absence which is omnipresently, obsessively on our minds as we read, and which, in one way or another, the novel itself exists to make present. The "myth of the Good City" is a surprising, but possible image underlying our major fiction. And it makes a great deal of sense to insist that, for a truly efficient reading of either *The Waste Land* or *Ulysses*, one needs to have, at minimum, a casual acquaintance with that most epochal and generative version of Western politics and society, *City of God*.

But if the myth of the City of God in so-called early modernism undergoes a gradual and radical process of disintegration, that is not to say that the myth simply no longer counts; rather it is to insist that it counts, if anything, more than it might in a more socially, psychologically stable era. By midcentury, at any rate, the dissolution of the myth of the Good City seems to have attained a totality, a terminal entropy, past which there is no direction to go except toward a new cohesion, a difficult and deliberate reconsolidation of those values the early years of the era had so successfully dismantled. At least that is the view I wish to maintain in this book, and one which appears to be borne out by the novelists I discuss and also by a more general—and essential—psychological, anthropological fact. For between the extremes of the Garden and the Map is a third term, the City itself, neither Edenically infantile pastoral nor mathematicized wasteland, at once both and greater than both, the true field of human civilization—just as language itself is both within and outside the mind, the condition on all possible utterances and, at the same time, the means through which we can escape from conditioned, inauthentic existence. And it is this field, the human City constructed on the foundation of our own fictiveness, which I think the so-called postmodernists, like their great originals the high romantics, most seriously explore. Robert Lowell, in his central poem, "Beyond the Alps," gives us a first approximation of this search for a new *polis*:

Life changed to landscape. Much against my will
I left the City of God where it belongs.
There the skirt-mad Mussolini unfurled
the eagle of Caesar. He was one of us
only, pure prose.

Life becomes landscape and landscape, terrifyingly here as in all of Lowell's poetry, becomes other—calcified and cold. And the verse,

which deliberately reduces itself almost to the level of "pure prose," participates in that linguistic emptying-out which is the real hell of the modern talent. But a turning away implies the possibility of a return, and the Augustinian City remains a felt chance of salvage for the poet—all the more convincingly, since it is nearly denied by the very language in which the hope is hinted at. One of the most intelligent critics of modern American writing, Tony Tanner, entitles his brilliant study *City of Words*. One cannot think of a title which better captures the sense, brooding in *Herzog*, manic in *An American Dream*, surreal in *V.*, of the intimate connection between the agonies of urban existence and the metaphysical snares of language. But, without imputing any specific religious orthodoxy to these books, it may also be said that their central attempt is, somehow, to return the city of words to a city of the Word—a city where human speech and human action may be, once again, truly human.

But such a return, such a reconsolidation, cannot be simply in terms of an unthinking reversion to modes and styles of belief whose validity has been permanently undermined. It is not, that is to say, a movement of despair—like the deathbed conversion of the lifelong sinner who finds, at the end, that he is at once bored and terrified by his own dissoluteness. Reconsolidation or reconversion of that sort, either in politics or fiction, is another variety of the distinctive psychosis of our time, fascism. It is a false nostalgia for a fallacious past—a past that not only never existed, but the very imagination of which poisons the fascist's attempts to realize it in his own contemporary experience. Of political varieties of this disease of the soul, our century is unfortunately and unmentionably full. And of literary varieties we could cite any number of crudely, dishonestly "simple" novels, any number of pompously "difficult" ones, and a growing number of psychoanalysis-at-home peptalks: all of which assert that one need only learn to become one's own best friend (as if that meant anything), to "get in touch" with one's "inner self" (as if that were not precisely the problem, rather than the solution).

A truly conservative fiction, on the other hand, would have to be a fiction which not only took account of the corrosive assertions of modern thought, but which accepted those assertions as irrefutable, as *faits accomplis* from which there is, really, no appeal. Its conservatism, in other words, would have to build again the myth of the City upon the deceptive, shifty, unstable foundation of our realization of that myth's own fictiveness. It would have to find a principle of personal authenticity, of personal integration within the universal cycles of man, society, and nature, which could bear the knowledge of inauthenticity, of universal pointlessness, established in the vi-

sions of Joyce, Eliot, Hemingway, and Faulkner. It would be a fiction which could accept the reality of man as “individual,” as living his life in demonically inverted commas, and could yet make of that reality a further “reality” which would assert the legitimacy of his claims to importance and moral existence.

To describe such a fiction is to describe an art of high subtlety and seriousness—an art which involves, in its innermost form, a consciousness of the last two hundred years and more of Western thought and imagination. For no fiction can hope to reintegrate the modern sense of inauthenticity if it does not itself recapitulate the history of the inauthentic sense, which is, to a great degree, the history of the romantic and postromantic movements.

In discussing the novels of Bellow, Mailer, Barth, and Pynchon, I shall often invoke the subtheme of “inauthenticity,” and indicate the ways each of these writers deals with the complexities and dangers of the “inauthentic voice.” I should, then, explain what I mean by that unwieldy phrase and what I take to be its preeminence during the last two hundred years. And it is not, after all, a very difficult concept to explain, since most of us have experienced it more frequently than we would like. As a friend of mine once said, you fantasize about your life as you fall asleep at night. And it looks as if your whole life is a film—somebody else’s film—with credits like, “Directed by my father, produced by my mother, and starring all the people I haven’t quite become in the role of me.” I sit in a cocktail lounge, order a martini, and think of James Bond; because somehow, even a thing as simple as my enjoyment of my drink seems to have been anticipated, described, and thereby emptied for me by another imagination. Anyone who has ever tried to write a poem (and who has not?) knows the sense of inauthenticity as surely and as “authentically” as Keats and Shelley knew it. You write two lines, pause, look them over, and discover with embarrassment that every word you have written sounds ridiculously derivative, imitative, simply a memory of the poems which have meant the most to you. The modern cult of tight-lipped, cool disengagement, like the more modern cult of frenetic, unself-conscious ecstasy—the Beat and the Hippie styles, respectively—are both, at heart, admissions of this nagging, almost insurmountable sense that one is not really there, that one does not actually feel what one thinks one feels, that life has become a gigantic acting-out of roles which have to end, have to be transcended, if we are ever really to believe that we have lived at all.

It is this sensibility which I call the inauthentic. And it is not only

our secret guilt, but very possibly the central fact of the last two hundred years—in society as well as literature. Philippe Ariès, in his invaluable book, *Western Attitudes toward Death*, writes of the sense of failure that accompanies the psychic development of urban man, “Today the adult experiences sooner or later—and increasingly it is sooner—the feeling that he has failed, that his adult life has failed to achieve any of the promises of his adolescence. This feeling is at the basis of the climate of depression which is spreading throughout the leisured classes of industrialized societies.” Indeed, Ariès is perhaps more courageous in articulating the universality of this feeling of failure than he is even in discussing death itself. For surely he is right. And surely, then, if death itself, the great scandal of human consciousness, has any reality in the lives of most urban men, it is just within this imagination of failure, of chances and identities lost or betrayed. We may go beyond Ariès’s description of the problem and further define the “feeling of failure,” the source of the “climate of depression,” as the specific feeling of life itself. We feel that we have, somehow—absolutely and irrevocably—failed. We feel that life is only an imitation of itself, a simulacrum, borrowed from the ideas, the goals, the procedures of other and better people as to how it should be lived. We panic because there seems, after a while, to be nothing we can call our own, nothing which bears the stamp of a free individual—and therefore, paradoxically, nothing which can bear the stamp of the truly social. With Ariès’s help, we can begin to see that the relationship between the individual and the social is more complicated than the most enthusiastic apologists for the apocalyptic mode imagine. For the loss of the City is also the loss of “personality,” for without the sense of identity within a culture, the individual’s sense of his own identity is bound to grow increasingly uneasy, mendacious, and inauthentic.

This curious problem is part of our inheritance from the seminal figures of romanticism. And if the last thirty years of fiction, poetry, and criticism have taught us anything, it is, surely, that we are still living in the “romantic period” of Western thought, still struggling with the conundrums and antinomies revealed (or invented) at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The four novelists discussed in this book have all in one way or another acknowledged their own intimate link to the visionary fiction of the romantic revolution—as have their important contemporaries John Berryman, Robert Lowell, William Burroughs, William Gaddis, and John Gardner, to name only a few.

But the relationship between romanticism and contemporary

writing is not, or at least not simply, a matter of influence. If the memory of the high romantics helps us make a larger sense out of the enterprise of our own best writers, it is also true that our own literature helps us recognize tendencies and forces within the romantic movement itself, whose real nature had to wait until the present to be made manifest. In literature, as in social and political evolution, the present can alter, even "influence" the past. And, indeed, the "romanticism" our critics and scholars have been rediscovering for some years now—after an age of disfavor under the reign of the New Criticism—is a peculiarly negative, dark version of the movement. Byron, for example, that most problematic and grimmest of all romantic poets, has recently attained a prominence in the canon which had been denied him almost since his death in 1824. And the Wordsworth described by influential commentators like Geoffrey Hartman and Harold Bloom as obsessive, wrestling with deep psychic evasions which at once create and occlude his poetic genius, bears little if any resemblance to the Wordsworth who, for John Stuart Mill and Matthew Arnold, seemed to offer a radiant possibility of sanity and peace amid the bewildering antitheses of nineteenth-century thought. The romantics we read and admire, in other words, are inevitably our romantics—filtered through the lenses of our own sense of the contemporary condition and our own sense of possible cures for that condition. And this is exactly as it should be.

Perhaps no romantic manifesto is more definitive than Blake's aphorism, "I must create a system or be enslaved by another man's." It is one of those germinal statements which not only makes, but includes its own, intellectual history: a summary and transformation of movements in thought and imagination preceding it and a prophecy (though an ironic one) of the future it helps create. Centrally romantic in its assertion, it is also centrally modern, postromantic in its implicit negations. And, as with the modern view of Byron and Wordsworth, it is the implicit negations of Blake's prophecy which strike us most immediately.

"Would to God that all the Lord's people were Prophets," quotes Blake at the beginning of *Milton*. The irony of the romantic prophecy is that its wishes, at least in literature, are granted. For if all the Lord's people do become prophets—that is, romantic poets—then it becomes nearly impossible to identify a "people" at all, in the sense of a shared community of belief, or even information, within which the poetic word can realize its efficacy. Man, in the romantic scheme, becomes the prey of a historical neurosis from

which he cannot even wish to escape. The human being, the world's only fictive animal, cannot help but "create a system," a language and an idiosyncratic rationality for controlling the world; trying not to do so is like trying to kill yourself by holding your breath or trying to make up a series of absolutely random numbers. But now—unlike, perhaps, medieval or Renaissance man—we are aware of the impossibility. And since we are aware of it, our writing and thinking take on the form of a struggle against it, a struggle to assert, in the face of the artificiality and facticity of all thought, an authentically human voice, an authentically civilizing idea. For the system itself, even the self-created system of the Blakean poet, is revealed, under the romantic dispensation, to be a trap, a deliverance of the self over to the claims of others, other men's ideas and other men's poems. Walter Jackson Bate has traced this uncomfortable intimation of poetic mortality to the work of Keats, calling it Keats's "embarrassment" at the wealth of poetic tradition, his despairing sense that everything important to be said in the Western tradition had been said. But a contemporary poet raises Keats's civilized despair to the pitch of despair, indeed. *Pereant qui ante nos nostra dixerunt*, John Berryman entitles one of his *Dream Songs* (225), may they perish who have written our poems, thought our thoughts before us:

Madness & booze, madness & booze.
Which'll can tell who preceded whose?
What chicken walked out on what egg?

This is not simply the fear of "unoriginality" but, rather, a terrified sense that "originality" itself, the ideal of the originating Word, may be only the behavioristic illusion of a predestinarian universe. And it is also, as Berryman's lines indicate with grim wit, a murderous chicken-and-egg problem. The poet's desire for an authentic voice is at war with the very sense of cultural and social belongingness which generates the poetic impulse itself. So the writer's vision, for which he must at the same time invent a voice and project an audience, turns into an obsessive concentration upon the velleities of speaking at all—Nabokov's ape tracing, again and again, the bars of its own cage. It is this dilemma that Harold Bloom describes so brilliantly as the "anxiety of influence," the fear of the modern writer that his own imaginative life is threatened, impinged upon by those very figures—even, ironically, himself—who are his strongest sources of inspiration.

For finally, inauthenticity as the fear of other men's systems be-

comes inauthenticity as the fear of one's own creative mind. Jean Genet, in *Our Lady of the Flowers*, observes that he hates his own writing, for as he puts the words down on paper, he says, they become, inevitably, cold, alien to himself, like fecal matter. It is an extreme, disgusting image of the business of writing, but all the more important for that. I mentioned earlier the annoyance of the man who tries to write two lines of a poem and gives it up because he finds them unoriginal; but such anger cannot compare, surely, to the despair of the man who finishes his poem and finds it, even when complete, alien and unrecognizable. Writing, the very act of taking personal vision and formulating it in terms of a preestablished, innately social system of signs and symbols, can come to be the most intimate form of self-betrayal, the most insidious form of inauthenticity. I have already said that all art is inimitably a social transaction and that the arts of language are most especially so, since language itself—as modern linguistics and anthropology have demonstrated—is the most primal of all social experiences.

One of the most severe struggles of the modern imagination, then, may be described as the quarrel of language with itself, with its own nature and origins. A large book remains to be written, in fact, about those central figures of the last two hundred years whose work consists exactly of this struggle, the attempt to forge a style which avoids the quotative nature of all language and yet, avoiding quotation, manages to fulfill the socializing, humanizing function of the human word. We could cite Byron, Wordsworth, Keats, Stendhal, Flaubert, Baudelaire, Henry James, Gertrude Stein, Joyce, Proust, Gide, Beckett, Hemingway, and Faulkner as only the most immediately suggestive names in such a history. And, as such a list further indicates, the history of this struggle against (and within) the word is also the history of that most remarkable feature of recent literary evolution, the progressive isolation of the writer from his audience, the birth and development of the “difficult book”—difficult not because of its obscure or arcane knowledge, nor because of the deliberate exoticism of its author, but difficult exactly because it intends to be perfectly clear, to give us a language reflecting absolutely our mental universe.

But there are serious reasons why the history I have briefly sketched here, of our imaginative, linguistic, and social dilemma, should come to a fruition and perhaps a new beginning in American writing since World War II. That war, and the new, industrialized, hyper-urban America which emerged from it, are living versions, desperately and materially real images, of the psychic perils invoked by

the romantic tradition. The war itself will loom large in my discussions of all four novelists, as indeed it does in the politics and sensibility of the last thirty years.

Defending his own interest in fairy tale and myth as a clue to the inner workings of the psyche, C. G. Jung remarks that we should have learned from the rise and fall of Nazism, if we have learned nothing else, that it is at his own peril that man ignores or denies the demons and monsters of the ancient legends. For denied, they are likely to erupt violently into his society, since their real dwelling place is, after all, within the very mind of man. Jung's is an eloquent description of the effect of World War II upon the European, and particularly the American, imagination. World War I, with shattering clarity, indicated for intellectuals of the twenties the collapse of the nineteenth-century dream of progress, or rational, benevolent capitalism, and of mankind's innate civilization. Novels like *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *A Farewell to Arms*, and even *Journey to the End of the Night* capture the nature and extent of this feeling of betrayal by the public verities of traditional society, and loss of faith in any but the most personal, existentially-tested standard of conduct and imagination. But World War II had an even more bitter lesson for writers, philosophers, and indeed for its survivors of every sort. It is a lesson articulated in T. W. Adorno's famous epigram, "No poetry after Auschwitz," or in novels like Gunter Grass's *Dog Years*, Jean Genet's *Funeral Rites*, and Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.'s, *Slaughterhouse-Five*—and, of course, in those two superbly unsettling war stories, *The Naked and the Dead* and *Gravity's Rainbow*. This war, with its heritage of the German death camps, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the fire-bombing of Dresden and, in fact, the six-year spectacle of human beings massively, nationally, and unself-consciously transformed into integers of bestiality—this war was, indeed, a nightmare-come-true of the worst apocalyptic expectations of the visionary poets, a seemingly terminal betrayal of man, by man, to his own worst phantoms, the return of Jung's demons with a vengeance. If the trenches of Argonne taught men to disbelieve in the sanity of nations, the ovens of Auschwitz and Hiroshima taught them to disbelieve in themselves. And both wars brought into the so-called real world the sense of crisis and self-mistrust which had been explored by romantic poets and novelists for nearly two hundred years. Marxist theory assumes that social changes, class struggles and class consciousness, bring about changes in the prevailing currents of imaginative writing, changes which rationalize and dignify the social facts. But the last two centuries

of literary history, and the last seventy years of military and economic history, almost lead one to conclude the reverse order of causality.

America emerged from World War II as the only clear victor: the only nation which managed both to be on the winning side and not to have been visibly, Pyrrhically ravaged in the very business of winning. But of course that is not true, either. The American scars from the war, like some of the mutations of Hiroshima, were to be longer in manifesting themselves, but because of their long germination, even more severe. The virtual explosion of industry in America, to a degree unsuspected before wartime production, was to generate, in the long run, the distinctively contemporary nature of the American city: no longer a relatively stable collection of individual, psychologically autonomous neighborhoods, but a great transfer-point for workers, both white- and blue-collar, whose livelihoods would depend precisely upon their being ready to move at the first opportunity or urging of the "company," and who therefore could never think of life in a specific city as more than a phase. The development of information-theory and information-technology, a direct result of the immense investment in cryptography during the war years, was to produce the manically engineered lusts of a consumer society like none the world has seen before, and also (and concomitantly) the network of instantaneous information-transmission—the news—which has come to play not merely an informational, but a causative role in our national politics. And most crucially, perhaps, the very involvement of America in the war, and the subsequent impossibility of diminishing that involvement in the life of Europe and the world, has created a new sensibility which, for better and worse, makes it impossible to return to the comfortable certitudes of autonomous national identity. The Cold War of the forties and early fifties, the Marshall Plan, the Vietnamese War (actually, one hopes, the last skirmish of World War II)—these major factors and myriad minor ones have resulted in what might be called the final Europeanization of the American imagination: a Europeanization one of whose happier effects has been to make American literature, and particularly the American novel, more self-consciously an heir, continuator, and critic of the romantic tradition of thought than it had previously been.

But the increase in Europeanization has been, it is important to note, not in the *nature* of American fiction, but in its self-consciousness *about* its nature. Leslie Fiedler, in *Love and Death in the American Novel*, describes America as a land doomed, from its beginnings,