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# Americká literatura

## Distanční studijní text

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**Obor:** Literatura a lingvistika

**Klíčová slova:** Americká literatura, Dějiny americké literatury, literatura období kolonialismu a revoluce, Transcendentalismus, Realismus, Naturalismus, Modernismus, meziválečná americká literatura, Poválečná americká literatura.

**Anotace:** Předmět se soustřeďuje na vývoj americké literatury od 17. století do konce 19. století a podává historický přehled vývoje americké literatury. Úkolem je přiblížit studentům kombinované formy studia významná díla americké literatury především z hlediska praktického. Důraz je tedy kladen na četbu a práci s konkrétními texty, jejíž součástí je textová analýza a její interpretace v kontextu americké literatury a kultury jako celku.

Zvláštní pozornost je věnována pokusu definovat specifika amerického písemnictví, jeho inspiračním zdrojům a vzájemným propojením, ale i postupnému vývoji od závislosti na "mateřské" literatuře britské k samostatnosti. Dále se soustřeďuje na vývoj americké literatury od počátku 20. století do současnosti. Velký důraz je kladen na období modernismu. Tento kurz se snaží ukázat různorodost americké literatury, velká část je věnována i literaturám kultur mimo "hlavní proud", převážně americké židovské a afro-americké literatuře.

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## ÚVODEM

Vážení studenti,

Vítejte v kurzu Americká literatura. Tento předmět je zařazen ve studijních plánech mezi povinné předměty Vašeho bakalářského studijního programu. Pro absolvování tohoto kurzu se předpokládá úspěšné zvládnutí kurzu Úvod do literatury, v němž se student seznámil se základní literární terminologií a literárními formami a získal schopnost je aplikovat na primární literární texty.

Tento studijní materiál obsahuje základní teoretický základ, v němž jsou představeny zásadní literární směry v kontextu americké literatury. Kurz je členěn do 3 částí, které chronologicky mapují zásadní rysy daného období a představují hlavní rysy a představitele daného literárního proudu. Jeho cílem je nejen podat přehled vývoje americké literatury, ale také dále rozvíjet schopnost práce s textem a kritického myšlení.

Vzhledem k obtížnosti samostudia, obzvláště v oblasti literatury, obsahuje každá kapitola část teoretickou, v níž jsou vysvětleny a ukázány hlavní rysy daného literárního směru a představeni zásadní autoři a díla daného období. Každá podkapitola obsahuje kontrolní otázky, jejich řešení najdete na konci každé kapitoly. V LMS Moodle najdete vybrané texty, které se k danému tématu vztahují. Součástí těchto textů jsou i otázky k diskuzi. Ty jsou určeny spíše k zamyšlení a k diskuzi během přímé výuky.

Přeji Vám hodně úspěchů při studiu.

## RYCHLÝ NÁHLED STUDIJNÍ OPORY

Studijní opora k předmětu Americká literatura představuje dějiny americké literatury od 17. století do současnosti. V popředí zájmu stojí jednak významné literární proudy a jejich představitelé, jednak politický a kulturní kontext, ve kterém tyto literární proudy vznikly. Student tak získá nejen znalosti literatury, ale i politického a kulturního kontextu a naučí se hlouběji vnímat souvislosti mezi literaturou a společenskými vlivy.

Studijní opora je rozdělena do 3 kapitol. Každá kapitola odpovídá jednomu setkání během přímé výuky. Každá kapitola obsahuje několik podkapitol, které odpovídají jednotlivým položkám sylabu. První kapitola představuje vývoj americké literatury od koloniálních počátků v 17. století do konce 19. století. Zahrnuje období revoluce a vzniku národní americké literatury, představuje počátky americké povídky, poezie a románu, a vysvětluje vznik realismu a naturalismu.

Druhá kapitola se věnuje americké literatuře v první polovině 20. století, zaměřuje se především na modernismus v poezii i próze a představuje i tzv. Ztracenou generaci. Třetí, poslední kapitola se zabývá vývojem americké literatury po druhé světové válce až do současnosti. Jednotlivé podkapitoly představují nejvýznamnější básnická hnutí a dramatickou tvorbu. Nejvíce pozornosti je věnováno vývoji prózy, kde je zahrnuta i etnická literatura.

## **1 BEGINNINGS OF AMERICAN LITERATURE: FROM THE 17TH UNTIL THE TURN OF THE 20TH CENTURY**



### **QUICK OVERVIEW**

This chapter introduces major trends and movements in American literature from its colonial beginnings to the turn of the 20th century. It focuses on essential movements and their representatives in the context of American history and culture.

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### **AIMS**

The chapter will:

- Introduce Colonial literature,
  - Introduce the literature of the Revolution,
  - Outline the beginnings of modern American prose and poetry,
  - Define and introduce realism and naturalism.
- 



### **KEYWORDS**

American Colonial literature, Literature of American Revolution, Puritanism, Political writing, Indian Captivity narratives, 19th century literature, Modern American poetry, Modern American prose, Realism, Naturalism

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## 1.1 COLONIAL LITERATURE

Where is the beginning of American literature? And what can be seen as American literature? Many “histories” of American literature start with the writing of Captain John Smith and his Pocahontas story, moving on to Puritan chronicles. Yet, can the texts be limited only to those written in English? The beginnings of American literature can be, and are, connected not only with the writings of Christopher Columbus and other explorers like Leif Eriksson (Voyages to Vinland), but also with the oral literature and culture of Native Americans before the arrival of Columbus.

There was **a rich Native American oral culture** in North America, even before the arrival of Europeans. The earliest myths, legends and songs were orally transmitted by the more than 500 hundred Indian tribes. Their cultures as well as languages were varied according to the place of their settlement, society organization, religion and way of life, e.g., narratives of hunting cultures like the Navajo, stories of agricultural tribes such as the Acoma, or desert tribes like Hopi.

As a vision America existed a long time before its discovery. Columbus, expecting to reach the shores of India brought with him a complex set of expectations. There was wealth, strange cultures and Paradise-like nature, yet at the same time, there were conflicts, diseases and danger. The first writers were mainly Europeans who brought their speech, manners, politics, and religion. The Colonists thought of themselves as Europeans; and, when they wrote, they discussed issues of interest in Europe, and followed European models of style. Yet from the very beginning, their Old World manner of life was modified by their new environment. Colonial literature was, therefore, the product of two basic forces: the European cultural heritage and the American environment.

The first written record of America, though not the mainland, came from CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS on the October 12, 1492 in *The Journal of the First Voyage of Christopher Columbus* (1492–3): “At two hours after midnight the land was sighted at a distance of 2 leagues.” (Adolph Caso, *To America*, 123) The explorers renamed the island to San Salvador and started to ruthlessly conquest the island by force.

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### POINTS TO REMEMBER



The beginning of American literature has a multilingual and multicultural background

America was seen as a new utopia, a paradise on Earth

Literature of the Colonies is a product of European culture and American environment

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# BEGINNINGS OF AMERICAN LITERATURE: FROM THE 17TH UNTIL THE TURN OF THE 20TH CENTURY

## 1.1.1 EARLY WRITING IN ENGLISH COLONIES

New England, which was named by John Smith, underwent a different development from the Southern colonies. This region was not settled by the more liberal Anglicans, but by their opponents, the Puritans, who wanted to „purify“ the church of England.

The first wave of Puritans, following Smith's maps, arrived to Plymouth, America in 1620 on the ship Mayflower. They also decided to keep records of way of life in the colonies. **Chronicle** thus became one of the most popular genre of the period. The Puritans brought with them printing press and in 1640 published the first book on American continent *A Bay Psalm Book*. It was a metrical version of Psalms to be used in churches.

The writers were examining and searching for the **relationship between God and man**, trying to separate the words from their ornamental and ceremonial meanings to present the truth about the world. The style, seemingly simple, included many metaphors and biblical allusions to the Old Testament, yet used only for clearer and more direct presentation of the way the Puritans envisioned the world.

The governor of the Plymouth Colony was WILLIAM BRADFORD (1590-1657). He was the judge, divided land and supervised trade and agriculture. He was born in England and soon joined the Separatists, who saw no hope of reforming the Anglican Church. He became famous for his chronicle *Of Plimouth Plantation* (written 1630–1650, published 1865) where he relates the beginnings of the settlement. It is the earliest record of Puritan ideas and intentions.

## 1.1.2 INDIAN CAPTIVITY NARRATIVE

The chronicles combine diaries with religious visions; this is true also for a typically American form: the Indian Captivity Narrative. It contains **the narration of obstacles, failures and difficulties in combination with nostalgia for the pure past**. The authors were telling their stories of Indian captivity and salvation. The stories included **elements of adventure and sermons**, as they were seen as a God's test. The most famous Indian Captivity narrative was written by MARY ROWLANDSON (c.1635-c.1678). She published her detailed account of her captivity during the French Indian War.

## 1.1.3 PURITAN POETRY

All writings were meant to cultivate and define a holy life. The works written chiefly for entertainment, such as theatrical plays or novels, were not appreciated. The Puritans supported only **religious, scientific and didactic writings**, yet there were several poets who, aside from keeping to the **spiritual and religious poetry**, were recognized even in Europe.

The first one was ANNE BRADSTREET (c. 1612-1672) who came to America when she was eighteen on the ship *Arbella*. She published the first book of poems by an American which was at the same time the first American book published by woman. It was released in England in 1650 under the title *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America* (1650) shows the influence of Edmund Spenser, Philip Sidney, and Metaphysical poets. Except for the religious themes, she often wrote about common everyday life and her husband and children. Moreover, she was also critical of the Puritan society, which treats women as inferior.

EDWARD TAYLOR (c. 1644-1729) was a poet and preacher born in England. He studied at Cambridge and then at Harvard College for three years. He knew Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. Taylor was influenced by the British Metaphysical Poets, mainly John Donne and George Herbert. He was aware of the anti-poetical sentiments in the community and even though he was addressing religious subjects, he decided to not to publish his poems. The first edition came out in 1937. He wrote elegies, lyrical poems and meditative poems. His best works, according to modern critics, are the series of short *Preparatory Meditations*.

MICHAEL WIGGLESWORTH (1631-1705) was like Taylor an English-born, Harvard-educated Puritan minister who practiced medicine. He continues the Puritan themes in his best-known work, *The Day of Doom* (1662) which became the best-selling poem of the period, dealing with the Calvinist doctrine of Last judgement in form of a ballad.

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## 1.2 LITERATURE OF THE REVOLUTION

In the 18th century the Puritan heritage was changing and adapting to the „Age of Reason“. The population increased, there were armed **conflicts with the Indians and rise of slavery**. The public figures became more liberal and more political. The main tendencies and beginnings of new American era are reflected in the thinking and work of Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790).

In the years 1753–58 Franklin was publishing *Poor Richard's Almanack* under a pseudonym Richard Saunders. This annual brochure included advice in how to get money and keep it, popular proverbs and encouragement. The books gained wide audience. Franklin believed that good work is more important than all-day prayers. Yet Franklin realized that preaching and moralizing does not have a large effect, he therefore decided to write an autobiography. where he would show on his own life what he means. He became **the model of a new self-made man and this term forms the basis of American dream**. He is describing his faults, showing that nobody is perfect from nature. Virtue is something to be learned. He believed that everyone has the ability to recognize good from bad and after that no one can do anything seriously wrong.

## BEGINNINGS OF AMERICAN LITERATURE: FROM THE 17TH UNTIL THE TURN OF THE 20TH CENTURY

For Franklin, the important thing was to be a **good and useful citizen**. This idea was elaborated in his essay "Information to Those Who Would Remove to America" (1784). America is in most aspects superior to England, yet there is still one thing lacking: the arts. As Franklin remarked in a letter to Miss Mary Stevenson (Philadelphia, March 25, 1763):

Of all the enviable things England has, I envy it most its people. Why should that petty Island, which, compared to America, is but like a stepping-stone in a brook, scarce enough of it above water to keep one's shoes dry; why, I say, should that little Island enjoy, in almost every neighbourhood, more sensible, virtuous, and elegant minds, that we can collect in ranging a hundred leagues of our vast forests? But it is said that Arts delight to travel westward. You have effectually defended us in this glorious war, and in time you will improve us. After the first cares for the necessities of life are over, we shall come to think of embellishments. (Franklin, *Works*, 246)

The writing of that time mostly reflected the struggle for independence. The main forms were thus **essays and pamphlets**. One of the essential concepts of Enlightenment was the rise of nationalism. As a good politician Franklin realized that America needed well organized political and cultural life. He wanted to raise patriotic and nationalistic feelings. He was one of the members of Continental Congress who drafted the Declaration of Independence and signed The Treaty of Alliance with France, The Treaty of Peace with England and the Constitution.

Political issues were also reflected in poetry.

**Philip Freneau** (1752-1832) is called the poet of American revolution. In 1771 he published a long patriotic poem "The Rising Glory of America", which was considerably revised in 1786. Yet he is mainly known for his early nature poems, especially "To a Wild Honeysuckle", and "The Indian Burying Ground" and thus anticipated the poetry of William Cullen Bryant, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman. Freneau fought as a militiaman during the Revolutionary War. In 1780, he was captured and imprisoned in two British ships, where he almost died before his family managed to get him released. His poem "The British Prison Ship" is a bitter description of the cruelties of the British.

After the revolution, American identity became a major issue addressed most famously by **Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur** (1735-1813).

### EARLY AMERICAN NATIONAL POETRY

After the Revolution American writers felt the need to establish truly American, national culture. They felt it was time to become independent of Britain and Europe not only politically but also on the cultural level. **Noah Webster** (1758-1843) compiled an *American Dictionary* and readers and spellers for the schools. Webster's dictionaries are still commonly used. And the poets were determined to compose American national poems.

### HARTFORD WITS/CONNECTICUT WITS

Timothy Dwight

Joel Barlow

John Trumbull

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### POINTS TO REMEMBER



Rise of slavery, struggle for political and cultural independence, rise of liberalism and rationalism

Benjamin Franklin coined the model of a self-made man

Major genres: political writings, letters (de Crèvecoeur), pamphlets, autobiographies (Franklin), political and national poetry (Freneau, Connecticut Wits)

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## 1.3 BEGINNINGS OF MODERN AMERICAN PROSE IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

One of the earliest American novelists who is sometimes called „the father of American novel“ was CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN. He was influenced by William Goldwin and transplanted the European Gothic tradition into American fiction. He published four novels dealing with the insanity, fear and paranoia: *Wieland, or the Transformation*, an American Tale (1798), *Ormon, or The Secret Witness* (1799), *Arthur Mervyn, or Memoirs of the Year 1793* (1799) and *Edgar Huntly, or memoirs of a Sleep-Walker* (1799). As he remarked in the Introduction to his last mentioned novel:

America has opened new views to the naturalist and politician, but has seldom furnished themes to the moral painter. That new springs of action and new motives to curiosity should operate; that the field of investigation opened to us by our own country should differ essentially from those which exist in Europe, may be readily conceived. The sources of amusement to the fancy and instruction to the heart that are peculiar to ourselves are equally numerous and inexhaustible. It is the purpose of this work to profit by some of these sources; to exhibit a series of adventures growing out of the condition of our country. (Brown, Huntly, 3).

Brown was thus inspired by the Gothic tradition but the novels are drawing on solely American resources. The tales are set mainly in America, where it is not only the wilderness

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anymore, which is dangerous and threatening, but also the cities. The landscape is often internalized, Brown thus brought psychological development into American prose and his works significantly influenced E. A. Poe, Herman Melville, and Nathaniel Hawthorne.

WASHINGTON IRVING (1783-1859) was a short story writer, essayist, travel book writer, biographer and columnist. He was the youngest of 11 children, born to a merchant family. Due to his poor health, he travelled to Britain, France and Germany, where he met Walter Scott and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In 1819–1820 he published *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, which is dedicated to his friend Walter Scott. It is a collection of stories that started the long tradition of American short story. The individual stories were influenced by the German folktales, which were transplanted into American context. The collection contains his two best known stories, "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow". In the *Sketch Book*, Irving transforms the Catskill Mountains along the Hudson River north of New York City into a magical region, establishing the American regionalist tradition. As the volume was very original, Irving was asking the readers to view this volume as an experiment.

JAMES FENIMORE COOPER (1789-1851) worked as a sailor on a merchant ship. Similarly to Irving, Cooper was also tracing the American past, namely the history of the American frontier. He was the founder of American historical novel, depicting the changes of American society since the settling of the Wild West. While Irving were searching for inspiration in European legends, Cooper turned to truly American themes. In a series of novels called *The Leatherstocking Tales* Cooper depicted the changes of the boundaries and destruction of the wilderness. The novels follow the adventures and experience of Natty Bumppo or Hawkeye, sometimes called the Leatherstocking and or Hawkeye, and his Indian companion Chingachgook from the Mohican tribe.

The most famous novel is *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), which is set in Far West in 1757, during the French Indian War. Natty Bumppo, here called Hawkeye, and his Mohican friends Chingachgook and his son Uncas are taking two young ladies, Cora and Alice to their father. Unlike fragile Alice, Cora has dark hair and is of mixed race. They are betrayed by their Indian guide Magua and Uncas and Cora die. Hawkeye then revenges their deaths and kills Magua. The book has inspired several films. The silent version of 1920 focused on the love triangle between Uncas, Cora and Magua. In Michael Mann's version (1992) Cora is portrayed as white and the interracial relationship between Uncas and Alice is left undeveloped. Uncas and Chingachgook are for the first time played by Native American actors, Eric Schweig and Russell.



### POINTS TO REMEMBER

Washington Irving, who was inspired by German folk tale, is the founder of American short story

Major genres and their representatives: Gothic novel (Brown), Adventure novel, frontier novel (Cooper), historical tales and short stories (Irving).

Major themes: Creation of sense of American history, nature, Indians

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## 1.4 BEGINNINGS OF MODERN AMERICAN POETRY

There was a group of poets who concentrated mainly on domestic topics. Sometimes they are also called Fireside poets or Schoolroom poets as they were often anthologized and they were the main American poets taught at schools. The most influential being: William Cullen Bryant, John Greenleaf Whittier, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Oliver Wendell Holmes and James Russell Lowell. Their poems were clear, accessible and comforting. They supported conservative values, were often sentimental and didactic and carried a moral message. The poems promoted the common sense, piety and honesty. The poets opposed social injustice, yet with the exception of Whittier and Lowell, they did not address these issues in their poetry. They mainly concentrated on common, known things that would appeal to wide audience. Their poetry was thus not original in themes but in its form. The fireside poets excelled in many poetic genres, such as ballads, idylls, meditations, or lyric poems.

Walt Whitman was born on Long Island, New York. At the age of 11 he left school to go to work. He was mainly self-taught. His collection *The Leaves of Grass* that Whitman kept revising all his life. The poem's innovative, unrhymed, free-verse form, open celebration of sexuality, democracy, and extreme Romantic assertion that the poet's self was one with the poem, the universe, and the reader permanently marked the development of American poetry. More than any other American poet or writer, Whitman invented the myth of democratic America.

The Americans of all nations at any time upon the earth have probably the fullest poetical nature. The United States is essentially the greatest poem. . . . Here is not merely a nation but a teeming nation of nations. Here is action untied from strings necessarily blind to particulars and details magnificently moving in vast masses. Here is the hospitality which forever indicates heroes.... Here are the roughs and beards and space and ruggedness and nonchalance that the soul loves (Whitman, *Leaves*, 5).

“Song of Myself” and the other poems included in *Leaves of Grass* were unusual for their use of free verse instead of conventional meter and end rhyme. They were breaking poetic conventions of rhyme, meter, and subject matter, and inspired many American modernist poets, such as Carl Sandburg, e. e. cummings, or Beat poet Allen Ginsberg.

Emily Dickinson (1830–1886) was one of the most prolific and original American, even though only a few poems were published during her lifetime. She was born in Amherst,

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Massachusetts, at a time of religious revivals. She never married, and for that time she led an unconventional life: she spent her whole life in her father's house and dedicated all her free time to writing poetry. She was inspired by nature and New England countryside.

Dickinson's poetry was influenced by the British Metaphysical poets, as well as her reading of the Book of Revelation and her upbringing in a Puritan New England town, which encouraged a Calvinist, orthodox, and conservative approach to Christianity. She admired the poetry of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, as well as John Keats.

She wrote more than eighteen hundred poems, some of which she copied into homemade manuscript books which she called fascicles. The handwritten poems show a variety of dash-like marks of various sizes and directions (some are even vertical).

Dickinson's terse, frequently imagistic style is even more modern and innovative than Whitman's. She never uses two words when one will do, and combines concrete things with abstract ideas in an almost proverbial, compressed style.

Dickinson's poems had many editions over the first half of the twentieth century, but not until 1955, when Thomas H. Johnson compiled *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, were they all printed together. Further research has challenged previous editors' transcriptions and analyses of her writing. Most recently, Ralph Franklin edited *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1998), which was published in three volumes.

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) was born in Boston. After his parents died, he was adopted by Mr. Allan and moved to Virginia. He is classified as a Southern writer though most of his works are set in Europe. Yet he had considerable influence on Southern literature. His vision of poetry was formed by the critical works of British romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge. „Poe sees the poet as a priest or shaman, using his arts to entice us into rejection of the her and now – even a kind of magician who is attempting in effect to enchant us, or simply trick us, into forgetting the laws of ordinary world.“ (Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 120).

His best-known poem is "The Raven" (1845). The haunted, sleepless narrator, who has been reading and mourning the death of his "lost Lenore" at midnight, is visited by a raven (a bird that eats dead flesh, hence a symbol of death) that perches above his door and ominously repeats the poem's famous refrain, "nevermore."

Poe's combination of decadence and dark romanticism influenced the French poets Stéphane Mallarmé, Charles Baudelaire, Paul Valéry, and Arthur Rimbaud. Poe accurately described the underside of the American dream of the self-made man and showed the price of materialism and excessive competition -- loneliness, alienation, and images of death-in-life.

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## POINTS TO REMEMBER



Fireside poets or Schoolroom poets as they were often anthologized and they were the main American poets taught at schools. They mainly concentrated on common, known things that would appeal to wide audience. Their poetry was thus not original in themes but in its form.

Major representatives: William Cullen Bryant, John Greenleaf Whittier, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Oliver Wendell Holmes and James Russell Lowell.

The major American poets of the late nineteenth century, **Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, and Edgar Allan Poe** rebelled against the didacticism and formal conventions of the mid-century Fireside Poets.

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## 1.5 REALISM AND NATURALISM

There were three writers who expressed their doubts and disbelief in the American optimism and progress. Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849), Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1864) and Herman Melville (1810–1891) searched the darker aspects of human existence, American past and nature.

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE was born in Salem, Massachusetts to a prominent New England family. This is also a region where he set most of his stories. His fiction deals mainly with his Puritan heritage, on one hand he was proud of his ancestors, yet he also felt guilt, especially because one of his forefathers John Hathorne was a judge in Salem witchcraft trials.

Though he became known for his stories, his most influential book was a romance *The Scarlett Letter*. The novel was published in 1850. The romance is set in a Puritan community and starts where all love stories usually end: When the love affair of Hester Prynne and Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale is over and Hester is having an illegitimate child, Pearl. Hester rather wears the scarlet A (for adulteress) for years than to reveal who is the father of her child. Her husband, Roger Chillingworth, who arrives from Europe, tortures Arthur until he confesses his adultery before dying in Hester's arms. Hester is also often seen as an American version of Anna Karenina.

HERMAN MELVILLE was born into an eminent family claiming war heroes and wealthy merchants on 1 August 1819 in New York City, New York State. He had seven brothers and sisters. The father loved to tell his children sea-faring tales of terror and adventure, and of places far away. He died when Melville was twelve and the family moved to the village of Lansingburg, on the banks of the Hudson River.

## BEGINNINGS OF AMERICAN LITERATURE: FROM THE 17TH UNTIL THE TURN OF THE 20TH CENTURY

His most famous novel is *Moby Dick* in October (1851) was inspired by epics of Homer, Chamois and William Shakespeare. Melville's captain Ahab pursues the whale and in one scene he talks to a skeleton of a whale, his black cabin boy Pip turns insane. Melville was also inspired by Shakespeare's style.

They sail on a ship *Pequod*, a company of people of all races, "a deportation from all the isles of the sea, all the ends of the earth." „It is the ship of America: embarked on an enterprise that is a curious mixture of the mercantile and the moral, imperial conquest and (ir)religious crusade – and precariously balanced between the notions of community and freedom. [...] So, like the letter ‚A‘ in Hawthorne's story, its determining characteristic is its indeterminacy. How it is seen as being and meaning, depend entirely on who is seeing it.“ (Gray 210–211).

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### 1.5.1 REALISM

Realism reached wide audience and was largely democratic. Realists try to represent life as it is, the characters speak in a colloquial language and act according to understandable motives, and the writer captures the manners and values of his time. The realist writer is not always concentrating on a specific region, but often confronts characters of different race, gender, class, education, or environment.

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#### DEFINITION - REALISM

Realism stresses the common and ordinary everyday life. Individuals possess free will and if they are not idealizing life and society, they can decide rightly. Realists concentrate on common characters living ordinary lives and having the same, or at least, similar experience as the reader.

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The American Civil War, which caused great social changes, was not – with very few exceptions – directly reflected in the writing of that period. Henry James, Walt Whitman, Mark Twain and William Dean Howells did not actively fight. The best novel describing the war appeared only after thirty years. It was Stephen Crane's *Red Badge of Courage* (1895). Within a few years America developed the most progressive steel industry in the world and built the most extensive railroad system, connecting the East with the West.

The conflict between South and North was forgotten due to rapid industrialization and expansion to the West. One of the results was a rise of mass education and mass culture

supported by the rapid development of magazines which gave the writers new and much wider audience. The same stories thus could be distributed throughout the whole America. American writers became concerned with common men and everyday life and they became dependent on their writing career. Literature was to describe life as it is. Realism introduced new settings, description of typical characters and ways of life in particular American regions. The characters also often speak in colloquial language with idioms, which had appeared only occasionally and solely in dialogues. As the father of American realism, William Dean Howells remarked: "The arts must become democratic... and then we shall have the expression of America in art."

WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS (1837–1920) was the editor of influential American magazines *Nation*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's Monthly Magazine* and *Cosmopolitan*. He is perhaps best known now for his novels *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885) and *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890) and for his thoughtful, even passionate, defense of Realism in fiction. Howells opposed sentimental or idealistic narratives in favor of true depictions of daily life and the internal struggles of men and women.

BRET HARTE (1836–1932) is called "the writer of the West" as he laid the foundations of western. He moved to California when he was eighteen. He worked as a teacher and later as a journalist. He was a chief editor of *Overland Monthly* where he started publishing his stories and poems. He introduced new characters of outlaws, prostitutes and gamblers. Yet he is describing them as innocent, warm-hearted people, almost as heroes. His most famous collection is *Outcasts of Poker Flat* (1868).

MARK TWAIN (1835–1910) grew up in the Mississippi River frontier town of Hannibal, Missouri. Ernest Hemingway's famous statement that all of American literature comes from one great book, Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The protagonist Huck has just been adopted by a respectable family when his father, in a drunken stupor, threatens to kill him. Fearing for his life, Huck escapes, feigning his own death. He is joined in his escape by another outcast, the slave Jim, whose owner, Miss Watson, is thinking of selling him down the river to the harsher slavery of the deep South. Huck and Jim float on a raft down the majestic Mississippi, but are sunk by a steamboat, separated, and later reunited. They go through many comical and dangerous shore adventures that show the variety, generosity, and sometimes cruel irrationality of society. In the end, it is discovered that Miss Watson had already freed Jim, and a respectable family is taking care of the wild boy Huck. But Huck grows impatient with civilized society and plans to escape to "the territories" -- Indian lands. The ending gives the reader the counter-version of the classic American success myth: the open road leading to the pristine wilderness, away from the morally corrupting influences of "civilization." James Fenimore Cooper's novels, Walt Whitman's hymns to the open road, William Faulkner's *The Bear*, and Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* are other literary examples.

## WOMAN WRITERS

## **BEGINNINGS OF AMERICAN LITERATURE: FROM THE 17TH UNTIL THE TURN OF THE 20TH CENTURY**

KATE CHOPIN (1851-1904). Her most famous novel is *The Awakening* (1899), about a woman's doomed attempt to find her own identity through passion. A young married woman with two children and a tolerant and successful husband gives up family, money, respectability, and eventually her life in search of self-realization and love.

Often paired with *The Awakening* is the fine story "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) by CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN (1860-1935). Both works were forgotten for a time, but rediscovered by feminist literary critics late in the 20th century. In Gilman's story, a well-meaning doctor drives his wife mad by confining her in a room to "cure" her of nervous exhaustion. The imprisoned wife projects her entrapment onto the wallpaper, in the design of which she sees imprisoned women creeping behind bars.

MARY WILKINS FREEMAN

MAY LOUISA ALCOTT

EDITH WHARTON

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### **QUESTIONS**

1. What are the main features of realism?
  2. Who are the major representatives of this movement?
  3. What were the major themes?
- 



### **ANSWERS**

1. The authors represent life as it is, the characters speak in a colloquial language, often concentrating on a specific region. Women writers mainly focus on psychological development and social oppression of women.
  2. Howells, Harte, Twain, Chopin, Gilman.
  3. American dream (Howells), growing up, non-conformity, slavery (Twain), American West and life of the outcasts (Harte), position of women (Chopin, Gilman)
-

## 1.5.2 NATURALISM

Realism turned into naturalism under the influence of the theories of Darwin, Marx and Freud. It believed in determinism.

Naturalism is a literary expression of determinism. Associated with **bleak, realistic depictions of lower-class life**, determinism denies religion as a motivating force in the world and instead perceives the universe as a machine. Eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinkers had also imagined the world as a machine, but as a perfect one, invented by God and tending toward progress and human betterment. Naturalists imagined **society as a blind machine, godless and out of control**.

**Stephen Crane**, the son of a clergyman, put the loss of God most succinctly:

A man said to the universe:

"Sir, I exist!"

"However," replied the universe,

"The fact has not created in me

A sense of obligation."

Like Romanticism, naturalism first appeared in Europe. It is usually traced to the works of Honoré de Balzac in the 1840s and seen as a French literary movement associated with Gustave Flaubert, Edmond and Jules Goncourt, Émile Zola, and Guy de Maupassant. It addressed the dark issues of modern society, such as divorce, sex, adultery, poverty, and crime.

STEPHEN CRANE (1871-1900) started as a journalist. He became famous for his short stories "The Open Boat," "The Blue Hotel," and "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky". He was also the first writer to write an impressionist novel about the Civil War: *The Red Badge of Courage*. His last novel *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893) is one of the earliest naturalistic novels.

JACK LONDON (1876-1916) became famous after the publication of his first collection of stories, *The Son of the Wolf* (1900), set in the Klondike region of Alaska and the Canadian Yukon. Other of his best-known books include *The Call of the Wild* (1903) and *The Sea-Wolf* (1904) that made him the best paid writer in the United States of his time.

THEODORE DREISER (1871-1945) as well as Crane and London, explores the dangers of the American dream, especially in his most famous novel *An American Tragedy*.

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## BEGINNINGS OF AMERICAN LITERATURE: FROM THE 17TH UNTIL THE TURN OF THE 20TH CENTURY



### POINTS TO REMEMBER

Realism: The authors represent life as it is, the characters speak in a colloquial language, often concentrating on a specific region. Women writers mainly focus on psychological development and social oppression of women.

Major representatives: Howells, Harte, Twain, Chopin, Gilman

Major themes: American dream (Howells), growing up, non-conformity, slavery (Twain), American West and life of the outcasts (Harte), position of women (Chopin, Gilman).

Naturalism: Low-class characters, failure of American dream, hostile environment, no freedom of choice. Urbanization, industrialization, Darwin, Freud, Marx.

Major representatives: Crane, London, Dreiser

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### STUDY GUIDE

In LMS Moodle you will find a text with study questions related to this era, marked as TEXTS 1-4. Please read them and try to answer the questions, you can use the questions as a guide to your reading. The text analysis will be carried out in class.

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### SUMMARY

This chapter introduces major trends and movements in American literature from its colonial beginnings to the turn of the 20th century. It focuses on essential movements and their representatives in the context of American history and culture. Firstly, it introduces major genres and features of the writing of the English colonies as well as the literature of the Revolution. It further discusses the beginning of modern American short story, novel and poetry. Finally, it provides an overview and main features of two major literary movements: realism and naturalism.

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### QUESTIONS

1. What are the main genres of Colonial Literature?

2. Who were the Puritans? Name three Puritan poets
  3. Who was the first American writer?
  4. What were major genres of the era and their representatives?
  5. Who were the founders of modern American poetry? Briefly characterize their style.
  6. What are the main features of naturalism? Which social aspects and theories influenced the rise of naturalism?
- 

**TAKE A BREAK**



Now it is time to take a break, you have finished the first chapter, which corresponds to our first in-class meeting.

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## 2 AMERICAN LITERATURE OF THE FIRST HALF OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY



### **QUICK OVERVIEW**

This chapter introduces major trends and movements in American literature of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with an exception of the Southern Literature that due to its overview character, stretches until the 1980s. It focuses on the new and modern techniques of writing within the context of American literature and culture.

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### **AIMS**

The chapter will:

- Define modernism and introduce major writers,
  - Introduce the Lost generation,
  - Outline the development of African American literature,
  - Outline the development of Southern literature
- 



### **KEYWORDS**

Modernism, Anglo-American modernism, Lost Generation, African American literature, the Harlem Renaissance, Southern fiction, the Beat Generation

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## 2.1 MODERNISM

### OUTLINE OF THE ERA

#### Historical, Social, & Cultural Highlights of the Modern Era

- 1): World War I (1914-1918) and World War II (1941-1945)
- 2) huge changes in industry, technology and cities as compared to the 19th century
- 3) the rise in power and influence of international corporations
- 4) the rise of transportation, communication, mass (or popular) culture
- 5) a belief in the desirability of industrialization, individual political rights, democracy, mass literacy and education, private ownership of the means of production, the scientific method, a disbelief in—or at least a questioning of—the existence of God, and rise of feminism

### CHARACTERISTICS OF MODERNISM IN LITERATURE

- 1) uses images and symbols as typical and frequent literary techniques
- 2) uses colloquial language rather than formal language
- 3) poetry close to a sculpture or a painting
- 5) form, style, and technique become as important--if not more so--than content.
- 6) the intention of writers in the Modern period is to change the way readers see the world and to change our understanding of what language is and does

EZRA POUND was born in Hailey, Idaho, in 1885. He became one of the major figures of modernism, as he was the one who defined and promoted a modernist aesthetic in poetry. He started a crucial exchange of work and ideas between British and American writers, and supported and published the work of such important writers, such as W. B. Yeats, Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams, Marianne Moore, H. D., James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, and T. S. Eliot. His own contributions to poetry begin with his definition of **Imagism**, a movement in poetry which derived its technique from classical Chinese and Japanese poetry--stressing clarity, precision, and economy of language, and foregoing traditional rhyme and meter in order to, in Pound's words, "compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in the sequence of the metronome." His later work, for nearly fifty years, focused on the encyclopaedic epic poem he entitled *The Cantos*.

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### DEFINITION – IMAGE

Image: an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.

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### DEFINITION – THREE PRINCIPLES OF IMAGISM

- Direct treatment of the “thing”, whether subjective or **objective**;
  - To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the **presentation**;
  - As regarding **rhythm**, to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in the sequence of a metronome.
- 

T.S. ELIOT (1888-1965) Thomas Stearns Eliot was born in St. Louis, Missouri. He studied at Harvard College, the Sorbonne, and Merton College of Oxford University. He studied Sanskrit and Oriental philosophy, which influenced his poetry. He also wrote influential essays and dramas. His first book of poems, *Prufrock and Other Observations*, was published in 1917, and immediately established him as a leading modernist poet. His poem *The Waste Land* published in 1922 is still considered by many to be the most influential poetic work of the twentieth century. He was influenced by the English metaphysical poets of the 17th century (most notably John Donne) and the 19th century French symbolist poets (including Baudelaire and Laforgue).

EDWARD ESTLIN CUMMINGS was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, October 14, 1894. Cummings left the United States for France as a volunteer ambulance driver in World War I. Five months after his assignment, however, he and a friend were interned in a prison camp by the French authorities on suspicion of espionage (an experience recounted in his novel, *The Enormous Room*) for his anti-war convictions. He also travelled throughout Europe, meeting poets and artists, including Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound or Pablo Picasso, whose work he admired. In his work, Cummings experimented with form, punctuation, spelling and syntax, creating new means of poetic expression. Later in his career, he was often criticized for not pressing his work towards further evolution. His poetry was largely popular, especially among young readers, for the simplicity of his language, his playful mode and his attention to subjects such as war and sex.

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS was born in Rutherford, New Jersey, in 1883. He studied at the University of Pennsylvania, where he met Ezra Pound, who had a significant influence on his writing. Williams became one of the principal poets of the Imagist movement, though later he became critical of Pound and Eliot, as he felt they were too attached to European culture and traditions. Continuing to experiment with new techniques of meter,

Williams sought to invent an entirely fresh—and singularly American—poetic, whose subject matter was cantered on the everyday circumstances of life and the lives of common people. His major works include *Kora in Hell* (1920), *Spring and All* (1923), *Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems* (1962), the five-volume epic *Paterson* (1963, 1992), and *Imaginations* (1970).

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### **POINTS TO REMEMBER**

Main features of modernity (the era): Urbanization, industrialization, feminism, world wars, immigration, mass culture.

Main features of modernism: New poetics, experiments with form, unrhymed poetry, allusions to European culture (Pound and Eliot)

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## **2.2 THE LOST GENERATION**

World War I, originally called the Great War, resulted in more than nine million deaths. The official starting point was the assassination of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria.

Prior to the war, young men were proud to stand and fight for their country; however, shortly after arriving in Europe and seeing the pointless death and destruction caused by tanks, poisonous gases, machine guns and flamethrowers (all of which were new arms at the time) were traumatized and left to wonder why their country would throw them into the meat grinder in such a fashion.

The generation raised during this time felt abandoned by their country. It was evident that the pillars that they were raised on (patriotism, faith and morality) had gone to the wayside, leaving the disenfranchised youth scrambling to make sense of their purposeless world. This “lost” concept trickled into all aspects of culture including literature and the reckless party “roar” of the 1920s.

Many of the defining literary figures of the Lost Generation (Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, T.S. Eliot, F. Scott Fitzgerald) felt that the America they knew was gone and could not be remedied. The writers criticized the loss of hope that war had taken from an entire generation of people and instead opted for a non-conformist life across the ocean in Europe. A life where patriotism was not mandatory, where faith was lost and morality was a rapidly fading concept.

## AMERICAN LITERATURE OF THE FIRST HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY

The Lost Generation is characterized by disengaged and pointless parties that lasted through the 1920s and ended in 1929 at the beginning of the Great Depression. Feeling that their home in America was gone, many members of the Lost Generation went to Paris.

For Hemingway, this meant the complete and total disregard of flowery language or symbolism. He is known for his simple and blunt sentence structure that, at first glance, exist only on a surface level.

F. Scott Fitzgerald also ponders the modern life without meaning in his debut novel, *This Side of Paradise*. It captures the mood of a generation that, because of fighting wars they did not believe in, no longer believes in God or humanity. In his most famous work, *The Great Gatsby*, he explores the murky morality of the rich during the hyper-hedonistic 1920s.

The phrase “Lost Generation” originates from a conversation Gertrude Stein overheard between a French garage owner and his employee in the early 1920s. While Stein was waiting for her truck to be repaired, the garage’s owner became displeased with the speed at which his employee, a young veteran of World War I, was working. The owner, in the ensuing argument, accused his employee’s generation of being “une génération perdue”—a lost generation. Stein, later recounting the story to Ernest Hemingway, adopted the label “Lost Generation” to describe the young generation that came out of the war (Hemingway, *Moveable Feast* 29). Hemingway then popularized the label in the epigraph to his first novel, *The Sun Also Rises* (Cowley 3).

In the years since Stein first applied the label “Lost Generation” to the World War I generation as a whole, the meaning of the term has contracted and now applies to expatriated American writers living in Paris during the 1920s.

Although for the most part, the Lost Generation rejected the guidance of previous generations, they tended to listen more to their innovative literary predecessors (Cowley 9). Gertrude Stein, Ford Madox Ford, and James Joyce were particularly influential on Lost Generation writers.

The war experience also affected the Lost Generation’s relationship with other generations. Because they had the unique experience of World War I, they felt irreparably disconnected from previous generations, which allowed them to criticize the world from outsiders’ perspectives. As F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote in “The Scandal Detectives,” “the gulf is infinite and unbridgeable” (qtd. in Cowley 7). But at the same time that feelings of separation alienated them from the rest of the world, it tightened their connections with each other, resulting in their proclamations of “kinship with one another” and “separation from older writers” (Cowley 6).

**Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald** (September 24, 1896 – December 21, 1940) was an Irish American Jazz Age author of novels and short stories. He finished four novels, left a fifth unfinished, and wrote dozens of short stories. During World War I, Fitzgerald enlisted in

the U.S. Army and fell in love with a rich and beautiful girl, Zelda Sayre, who lived near Montgomery, Alabama, where he was stationed. Zelda broke off their engagement because he was relatively poor. After he was discharged at war's end, he went to seek his literary fortune in New York City in order to marry her. His first novel, *This Side of Paradise* (1920), became a best-seller, and at 24 they married. They moved to France in 1924 and returned seven years later. Zelda became mentally unstable and had to be institutionalized; Fitzgerald himself became an alcoholic and died young as a movie screenwriter. Fitzgerald's secure place in American literature rests primarily on his novel *The Great Gatsby* (1925), a story about the American dream of the self-made man.

**Ernest Hemingway** (1899-1961) spent childhood vacations in Michigan on hunting and fishing trips. He volunteered for an ambulance unit in France during World War I, but was wounded and hospitalized for six months. After the war, as a war correspondent based in Paris, he met expatriate American writers Sherwood Anderson, Ezra Pound, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Gertrude Stein, who in particular, influenced his spare style.

His novel *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) made him famous. Later he wrote about the Spanish Civil War, World War II, and the fighting in China in the 1940s. On a safari in Africa, he was badly injured when his small plane crashed; still, he continued to enjoy hunting and sport fishing, activities that inspired some of his best work. *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), a short poetic novella about a poor, old fisherman who heroically catches a huge fish devoured by sharks, won him the Pulitzer Prize in 1953; the next year he received the Nobel Prize.

Like Fitzgerald, Hemingway became a spokesperson for his generation. But instead of painting its fatal glamour as did Fitzgerald, who never fought in World War I, Hemingway wrote of war, death, and the "lost generation" of cynical survivors. His characters are not dreamers but tough bullfighters, soldiers, and athletes. If intellectual, they are deeply scarred and disillusioned. His hallmark is a clean style devoid of unnecessary words. Often he uses understatement: In *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) the heroine dies in childbirth saying "I'm not a bit afraid. It's just a dirty trick." He once compared his writing to icebergs: "There is seven-eighths of it under water for every part that shows."



**POINTS TO REMEMBER**



Main features of the 1920s: Popularity of jazz, rise of popular culture, rise of tycoons and upper class.

Major representatives and their works: Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, Hemingway, *Old Man and the Sea*.



### 2.3 AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE AND THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

The increase of slavery started the Abolitionist debates in the North. Moreover, Andrew Jackson not only supported slavery but also passed the Indian Removal Act (1830). The slave narratives started to be published in the late 1700s and reached the peak of popularity before the outbreak of the Civil War. The writers were **describing their living condition and often attempts at escape**, which would, however, not be the total solution, as their families were left behind and the future in the North was not secure. **The author writes mainly for white audience** to gain wider sympathy and understanding and also to prove (like other minorities) their social usefulness and adaptability.

Many African Americans felt disappointed by the differences between the slogans of the Revolution promising freedom and equal rights and its insistence of slavery as a legal institution. One of the early opponents of this injustice was Lemuel Haynes (1753–1833), an evangelical minister. His address, ‘Liberty Further Extended: Or Free Thoughts on the Illegality of Slave-Keeping’ (written early in his career but not published until 1983) refers to the Declaration of Independence and proclaims that the “unalienable rights” should apply to all human beings. Similarly to Haynes, Olaudah Equiano (1745–97) was born in Africa as a free man. He was taken to Barbados and later to Virginia where he was enslaved. In 1776 he regained his freedom. He described his life experience in *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Valla, the African, Written by Himself* (1787).

Another influential representative of the genre was *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845). Douglass (1817–95) was born on a plantation in Maryland. His father was white, presumably his master. Douglass was sent to Baltimore where he learnt to read and write. He escaped to the North where he started to give lectures on slavery and became one of the most prominent anti-abolitionist black leaders.

The poetic tradition was established by two African American poets: Jupiter Hammon (1711–ca.1806) and Phillis Wheatley (1753–84). Hammon was born a slave and his collection *Evening Thought: Salvation by Christ, With Penitential Cries* (1760) was the first to be published by African American. He wrote one poem to Wheatley: ‘An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatly, Ethiopian Poetess, in Boston, who came from Africa at eight years of age, and soon became acquainted with the gospel of Jesus Christ’ (1778). Phillis Wheatley published her collection called *Poems* in 1773 in London.



#### POINTS TO REMEMBER

The slave narratives started to be published in the late 1700s and reached the peak of popularity before the outbreak of the Civil War. The writers were **describing their living condition and often attempts at escape**.

**The author writes mainly for white audience** to gain wider sympathy and understanding and also to prove (like other minorities) their social usefulness and adaptability.

The poetic tradition was established by two African American poets: Jupiter Hammon (1711–ca.1806) and Phillis Wheatley (1753–84).

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## HARLEM RENAISSANCE

During the 1920s, Harlem, the black community situated uptown in New York City, became a fashionable and cultural center, featuring jazz musicians and composers like Duke Ellington or Bessie Smith. Ethel Waters, the black actress, triumphed on the stage, and black American dance and art flourished with music and drama.

**Langston Hughes** (1902-1967) embraced African- American jazz rhythms and was one of the first black writers to attempt to make a profitable career out of his writing. Hughes incorporated blues, spirituals, colloquial speech, and folkways in his poetry. Hughes published numerous black anthologies and began black theatre groups in Los Angeles and Chicago, as well as New York City. He also wrote effective journalism, creating the character Jesse B. Semple ("simple") to express social commentary. One of his most beloved poems is "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" (written 1921, published 1925).

**Countee Cullen** (1903-1946) wrote rhymed poetry, in accepted forms, which was much admired by whites. He believed that a poet should not allow race to dictate the subject matter and style of a poem. On the other end of the spectrum were African-Americans who rejected the United States in favour of Marcus Garvey's "Back to Africa" movement. Somewhere in between lies the work of Jean Toomer.

**Jean Toomer** (1894-1967) Like Cullen, African-American fiction writer and poet Jean Toomer envisioned an American identity that would transcend race. Perhaps for this reason, he employed poetic traditions of rhyme and meter and did not seek out new "black" forms for his poetry. His major work, *Cane* (1923), incorporates poems, prose vignettes, stories, and autobiographical notes.

**Richard Wright** (1908-1960) was born into a poor Mississippi family that his father deserted when the boy was five. Wright was the first African-American novelist to reach a general audience. His harsh childhood is depicted in one of his best books, his autobiography, *Black Boy* (1945). His work includes *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938), a book of short stories, and a novel *Native Son* (1940), in which Bigger Thomas, an uneducated black youth, mistakenly kills his white employer's daughter, gruesomely burns the body, and murders his black girlfriend -- fearing she will betray him.

**Zora Neale Hurston** (1903-1960) was born in the small town of Eatonville, Florida. She first came to New York City at the age of 16 as a member of a travelling theatrical troupe.

## AMERICAN LITERATURE OF THE FIRST HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY

As a gifted storyteller who captivated her listeners, she attended Barnard College, where she studied with anthropologist Franz Boaz, who urged her to collect folklore from her native Florida environment, which she did. Her most important work, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), is a story of a beautiful mulatto woman's growing up and search for happiness as she moves through three marriages. The novel evokes the lives of African-Americans working the land in the rural South. Hurston inspired and influenced such contemporary writers as Alice Walker and Toni Morrison through books such as her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942).

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### POINTS TO REMEMBER

Major themes of African American poetry: oppression, racism, equal rights, African American culture.

Harlem Renaissance: attempt to create African American cultural and literary tradition, incorporate music, especially jazz and blues into poetry (Hughes), to question the influence of race upon writing (Toomer, Cullen), to raise awareness of the lives of African American women (Hurston).

## 2.4 SOUTHERN LITERATURE

In its simplest form, Southern literature consists of writing about the American South, with the South either being defined as the Deep South states of South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Tennessee, Mississippi and Louisiana, or the extended South which includes the border states such as Kentucky, North Carolina, Virginia, and Arkansas and the peripheral Southern states of Florida and Texas.

In addition to the geographical component of Southern literature, certain themes have appeared because of the similar histories of the Southern states in regard to slavery, the American Civil War, and Reconstruction. The conservative culture in the South has also produced a strong focus within Southern literature on the significance of family, religion, and community in one's personal and social life. The South's troubled history with racial issues also continually appears in its literature.

Despite these common themes, what makes writers and their literature Southern is sometimes open to debate. For example, Mark Twain, arguably the father of Southern literature, defined the characteristics that many people associate with Southern writing in his novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. He even referred to himself as a "Southern writer." Despite this, his birthplace of Missouri is not traditionally considered to be part of The South. In addition, many famous Southern writers headed to the Northern U.S. as soon as they were old enough to make it on their own. So while geography is a factor, the geographical birth of the author is not the defining factor in Southern writing.



In the 1920s and '30s, a renaissance in Southern literature began with the appearance of writers such as William Faulkner, Tennessee Williams, Katherine Anne Porter. Because of the distance the Southern Renaissance authors had from the American Civil War and slavery, they were more objective in their writings about the South. Writers like Faulkner, who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954, also brought new techniques such as stream of consciousness and complex narrative techniques to their writings (such as in his novel *As I Lay Dying*). "As I Lay Dying" is told by changing narrators ranging from the dead Addie, to her young son.

In the late 1930s one of the most well-known Southern novels was published: *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell. The novel, published in 1937, quickly became a bestseller and was made into an equally famous movie. Southern literature became popular across genres; children's books like *Ezekiel*, published in 1937 by writer/illustrators like Elvira Garner, drew audiences outside the South.

From the 1940s onward, Southern literature grew thematically as it embraced the social and cultural changes in the South resulting from the **American Civil Rights Movement**. In addition, more female and African American writers began to be accepted as part of Southern literature, including African Americans such as Zora Neale Hurston, Sterling Allen Brown, and Dori Sanders, along with women such as Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor, and Carson McCullers. Other well-known Southern writers of this period include Reynolds Price, James Dickey, and Walker Percy.

One of the most highly praised Southern novels of the 20th century, *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, won the Pulitzer Prize when it was published in 1960. Another famous novel of the 1960s is *A Confederacy of Dunces*, written by New Orleans native John Kennedy Toole in the 1960s but not published until 1980 -- it won the Pulitzer Prize in 1981 and has since become a cult classic.

William Faulkner (1897-1962) Born to an old southern family, William Harrison Faulkner was raised in Oxford, Mississippi, where he lived most of his life. Faulkner created an entire imaginative landscape, Yoknapatawpha County, mentioned in numerous novels, along with several families with interconnections extending back for generations. Yoknapatawpha County, with its capital, "Jefferson," is closely modelled on Oxford, Mississippi, and its surroundings. Faulkner re-creates the history of the land and the various races -- Indian, African-American, Euro-American, and various mixtures -- that have lived on it. Faulkner **experimented with narrative chronology, different points of view and voices** (including those of outcasts, children, and illiterates).

The best of Faulkner's novels include *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and *As I Lay Dying* (1930), two modernist works experimenting with viewpoint and voice to probe southern families under the stress of losing a family member; *Light in August* (1932), about complex and violent relations between a white woman and a black man; and *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), perhaps his finest, about the rise of a self-made plantation owner and his tragic fall

## AMERICAN LITERATURE OF THE FIRST HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY

through racial prejudice and a failure to love. Faulkner's themes are southern tradition, family, community, the land, history and the past, race, and the passions of ambition and love. He also created three novels focusing on the rise of a degenerate family, the Snopes clan: *The Hamlet* (1940), *The Town* (1957), and *The Mansion* (1959).

Today the American South is undergoing a number of cultural and social changes, including rapid industrialization and an influx of immigrants to the region. As a result, the exact definition of what constitutes southern literature is changing. For example, Truman Capote, born and raised in the Deep South, is best known for his novel *In Cold Blood*, a piece with absolutely none of the characteristics associated with "southern writing." Other southern writers, such as popular author John Grisham, rarely write about traditional southern literary issues at all.

An important voice in American literature, Flannery O'Connor (1925–1964) wrote two novels and 31 short stories. She was a Southern writer in the vein of William Faulkner, often writing in a Southern Gothic style and employing regional settings and grotesque characters. However, she remarked "anything that comes out of the South is going to be called grotesque by the northern reader, unless it is grotesque, in which case it is going to be called realistic" (Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose 40). Her texts often take place in the South and revolve around morally flawed characters. She often uses foreshadowing, giving a reader an idea of what will happen far before it happens. Finally, she ends each work with a disturbing and ironic conclusion.

Her two novels were *Wise Blood* (1952) and *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960). She also published two books of short stories: *A Good Man Is Hard to Find and Other Stories* (1955) and *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, published posthumously in 1965.

Among the prominent southern writers today are Barry Hannah, Pat Conroy, Fannie Flagg, Randall Kenan, Ernest Gaines, John Grisham, Tom Robbins, Tom Wolfe, Wendell Berry, Cormac McCarthy, Anne Rice, Edward P. Jones, Barbara Kingsolver, and Anne Tyler.



### POINTS TO REMEMBER

Major themes of Southern fiction: Southern tradition, Civil war, family, community, the land, history and the past, race.

Southern fiction is hard to define: Writers born in that region do not write about it (Capote), while writers born elsewhere do (Poe), cultural and social shifts, redefinition of the canon (acceptance of African American writers, Hurston).

Major representatives: William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, Cormac McCarthy.

## STUDY GUIDE



In LMS Moodle you will find texts with study questions related to this era, marked as TEXTS 5-8. Please read it and try to answer the questions, you can use the questions as a guide to your reading. The text analysis will be carried out in class.

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## SUMMARY



This chapter introduces major trends and movements in American literature in the first half of the 20th century.

It focuses on essential movements and their representatives in the context of American history and culture. Firstly, it introduces major genres and features of modernism. It further discusses the Lost generation, African American literature and Southern writing.

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## QUESTIONS



1. What are the main features of modernism? Which social aspects and theories influenced the rise of modernism?
  2. Define image.
  3. What was the aim of the Harlem Renaissance? Name at least two representatives.
  4. What were the major themes of Southern fiction? Name at least two representatives.
- 

## TAKE A BREAK



Now it is time to take a break, you have finished the second chapter, which corresponds to our second in-class meeting.

### 3 AMERICAN LITERATURE OF THE SECOND HALF OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY



#### **QUICK OVERVIEW**

This chapter introduces major trends and movements in American literature of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It focuses on the new and modern techniques of writing within the context of postwar American literature and culture.

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#### **AIMS**

The chapter will:

- Outline postwar prose, poetry and drama,
  - Introduce contemporary American fiction,
  - Introduce postwar African American literature,
  - Introduce postwar American Jewish fiction,
- 



#### **KEYWORDS**

Postwar prose, postwar drama, postwar poetry, ethnic literatures, African American literature, American Jewish literature

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## 3.1 AMERICAN DRAMA

### 3.1.1 PRE-WAR DEVELOPMENT

American drama imitated European theatre until the 20th century. One of the causes was the American copyright law that did not protect and promote American dramatists together with the “star system,” in which actors and actresses, rather than the actual plays, were given most acclaim. While the drama was not appreciated by the Puritans and banned during the Revolution, the popular dramatic forms were on the rise:

vaudeville (popular variety theatre involving skits, clowning, and music).

Minstrel shows, based on African-American music and folkways -- performed by white characters using "blackface" makeup.

ELMER LEOPOLD RICE (1892-1967) studied law at New York University. He became a playwright and used his experience in his works. His plays often reflected the social and political issues of their day. His first drama, *On Trial* (1914), was the first American play to use the **flashback** technique, important also in literature and movies. *The Adding Machine* (1923) is an expressionistic fantasy presenting the dehumanizing effects of machines. His *Street Scene* (1929) is a realistic drama set in the New York City slums, received the 1929 Pulitzer Prize in drama and in 1947 was made into an opera by the American poet Langston Hughes and the German-born American composer Kurt Weill. *Street Scene* premiered at the Adelphi Theater, Broadway, on January 6, 1947.

EUGENE O'NEILL (1888-1953) became the first American Nobel prize winner for drama. His earliest dramas concern the working class and poor; later works explore obsessions and sex, under the influence of Sigmund Freud. He focused on the Freudian issues of love and dominance within families in a trilogy *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931), based on the classical Oedipus complex. His later plays include *The Iceman Cometh* (1946), and *Long Day's Journey Into Night* (1956), an autobiography focusing on his own family and their physical and psychological deterioration. He often used **masks; Shakespearean monologues and Greek choruses**.

#### OTHER PLAYWRIGHTS

THORNTON WILDER

CLIFFORD ODETS

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### POINTS TO REMEMBER

Original American drama started in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was mainly based on star system and supported the development of popular form.

Most influential and original playwrights: Ibsen and O'Neill (Nobel Prize)

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### 3.1.2 POSTWAR AMERICAN DRAMA

LILLIAN HELLMAN (1905–1984) a Jewish Southern dramatist. The first popular play was *The Children's Hour* (1934), a story a little spoiled girl accuses her teachers of lesbian relationship. This lie has tragic consequences, the school is closed and the life of both teachers is ruined. One of them loses her fiancée and the other one commits a suicide because she realizes she really is in love with her best friend. In her following plays that brought her fame she is describing the social changes of the American South, i.e. The South before and after the Civil war (1861-1865). Her most famous work are *The Little Foxes*, 1939. It is a story of a former aristocratic family that got rich during the war and they run new businesses. Like little foxes in the biblical vineyard they destroy everything valuable for their own profit. Hellman returned to the Hubbard family history again in the play *Another Part of the Forest* (1946), which was set in Alabama in 1880. Chronologically it precedes *The Little Foxes*

From the mid-1930s, Hellman was irregularly involved in liberal and leftist activities and organizations. She also wrote an antifascist play *The Watch on Rhine*, 1941. Hellman was blacklisted from the late 1940s to the 1960s. Among latter important plays belong *Toys in the Attic*, 1960. In 1969 Hellman published *AN UNFINISHED WOMAN*, the first of three memoirs that dealt with her social, political, and artistic life. Followed four years later by *PENITENTIA: A BOOK OF PORTRAITS* and in 1976 by *SCOUNDREL TIME* dealing with the fifties.

ARTHUR MILLER (1915–2005) became one of the most important American playwrights. His main theme is the false ideal of American dream and the unnecessary suffering and deaths caused by the will to succeed. His plays were never complicated or symbolical and therefore gained wide audiences.

*His play All my Sons*, 1947 is a combination of family story and social criticism. It is a story Mr. Keller who is selling guns for the government during the war. He does not want to lose the job and sells them defective pieces for aircrafts. This causes deaths of many soldiers including one of his sons. Yet the family keeps refusing the death. Admitting it would mean that Keller is a murderer. Keller himself does not want to accept his guilt but when his other son finds out the truth, he commits a suicide. This play poses questions of

responsibility and guilt. Who is responsible for the deaths? Is Kellers son also a murderer when he pushed his father to suicide?

*Death of a Salesman* 1949 is a play about the falseness of the American dream and its destructivity. Willy Lowman, an ageing salesman, is a stranger in a business world as well as in his family. Willy is an average person, he does have the skills to become successful. He is constantly referring to his famous ancestors, but he cannot live up to his ideals, he hopes his two sons will have the bright future. Willy is blind to reality, he does not want to admit his failure or the failure of his sons, he mixes his dreams, his past and bits of real life. His two sons Biff and Happy believe they will have bright future but after the death of their father they follow their fathers dream. Deciding that he is worth more dead than alive, Willy kills himself in his car - hoping that the insurance money will support his family and his son Biff could get a new start in his life. He is exceptional in one thing, unlike many others, he does realize that he is average. The only valuable thing he can leave to his family is the life insurance.

*The Crucible*, 1953 is a reaction to the period of McCarthyism, Miller is drawing parallels between the witch hunt in Salem in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (1692) and the 50s hunt for communists, both real and imaginary. *View from the Bridge* (1955), *After the Fall* (1965), *Incident at Vichy* (1965) The last mentioned play deals with a group of men waiting for their deportation to concentration camp. The camp represents a universal evil and guilt. His last successful play was *Playing for Time*, 1984 based on real facts. It tells the story of a women orchestra in concentration camps. Yet Miller's plays are not negative, he refuses to give up to violence, he believes that human existence is not absurd, it does make sense. The problem is not to avoid evil, but to become aware of it but how to live with it.

#### TENNESSEE WILLIAMS (1911-1983)

His plays openly reflect sexual and psychological aspects of relationships which are traditionally controversial. His shocking plays are full of neurotic characters, sexually obsessed men and women, violence, both physical and mental. One of the main motifs of Williams's plays is the contrast and conflict between fragile, highly sensitive character and the world or other characters that represent the animalistic, aggressive forces. The action of the play is based on the attempts of the fragile and sensitive characters to defend their old values, life-style and innocence in a world that cannot accept them and does not understand them. However, this duality is not presented as the fight between good and evil, there are no black and white characters. Williams always handles his themes with high complexity even within one play, the image of love in his plays ranges from sentimental, idealistic love to sexual passion or prostitution. (for example in the play *Camino Real*)

All his plays show the subjective thoughts and emotions of the character, there is no objective comment or standpoint. In all of his plays he deals with the isolation of individual characters, their inability to explain themselves, to have a meaningful conversation with others - which is the basic premise for love and understanding.

## AMERICAN LITERATURE OF THE SECOND HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY

Williams was no formal experimenter like O'Neill but he uses more poetic language, his plays are full of symbols. His plays are a synthesis of expressionism, impressionism and symbolism. His plays have their specific atmosphere and mood.

There are three main groups of his plays:

**early plays:** *Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), *Glass Menagerie* (1945), *Summer and Smoke* (1948). In these plays which are the most realistic he presents his main themes: contrast of illusion and reality, body and soul. All these plays are fragmentary and are Williams's most realistic works.

The **second group** of plays: *The Rose Tattoo* (1951), *Camino Real* (1953). *Camino Real* is a image of modern hell, it presents a moral wasteland. It is a combination of surrealism, caricature and myth. There are many characters, among others Don Quixote, or Byron.

Third group of plays: Williams received Pulitzer Prize for *CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF* (1955), about the moral decay of a Southern family. *ORPHEUS DESCENDING* (1957), *Suddenly Last Summer*, (1958). These plays are criticism of contemporary society, they contain images of greed, corruption, drug usage, cannibalism (*Suddenly last summer*). These plays are close to images of *Troilus and Cressida* by Shakespeare. He is showing the degeneration of youth and innocence into perversity, drunkenness and illusions.

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### POINTS TO REMEMBER

Major themes in the postwar drama: Fascism, Civil War (Hellman), falsity of American dream (Miller), innocence versus reality (Williams); Williams, *Streetcar Named Desire*, Miller, *All My Sons*

Most influential and original playwrights: Miller, Hellman, Williams

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## 3.2 AMERICAN POSTWAR POETRY

### 3.2.1 THE SAN FRANCISCO RENAISSANCE AND THE BEAT GENERATION

San Francisco Renaissance is a term for writers and artists in the Bay Area at the end of World War II. It was not a single movement, but rather groups of many different communities that migrated to San Francisco during the postwar era seeking out the remnants of bohemian culture in America of the twenties. The poets refused both formalism



and modernism, but they did not share any aesthetic program. Most of them however reacted to the second world war and restrictions of the fifties. Most of them were influenced by Whitman and their poetry is very often confessional and connected with the San Francisco region. As they were not part of the mainstream poetry, they started their own publishing house, The City Lights.

Some of the major writers involved in the San Francisco Renaissance included KENNETH REXROTH, WILLIAM EVERSON, ROBIN BLASER, and MICHAEL MCCLURE. The last one, ROBERT DUNCAN is more associated with the *Blackmountain School* of CHARLES OLSEN, but he introduced many of the central figures of the San Francisco Renaissance to each other while teaching poetry workshops at San Francisco State College. This loosely bound group often gathered in Rexroth's home where they were discussing poetry and politics.

LAWRENCE FERLINGHETTI was born in Yonkers, New York, in 1919. After spending his early childhood in France, he received his B.A. from the University of North Carolina, an M.A. from Columbia University, and a Ph.D. from the Sorbonne. During World War II he served in the US Naval Reserve and was sent to Nagasaki shortly after it was bombed. He married in 1951 and has one daughter and one son.

In 1953, Ferlinghetti and Peter Martin began to publish City Lights magazine. They also opened the City Lights Books Shop in San Francisco to help support the magazine. In 1955, they launched City Light Publishing, a book-publishing venture. City Lights became known as the heart of the "Beat" movement, which included writers such as KENNETH REXROTH, GARY SNYDER, ALLEN GINSBERG, and JACK KEROUAC.

Ferlinghetti is the author of more than thirty books of poetry, including *Americus, Book I* (New Directions, 2004), *San Francisco Poems* (2002), *Who Are We Now?* (1976), *The Secret Meaning of Things* (1969), and *A Coney Island of the Mind* (1958). He has translated the work of a number of poets including Nicanor Parra, Jacques Prevert, and Pier Paolo Pasolini.

Like the "Lost Generation" of the 1920s, the American "Beat Generation" of the 1950s names both a literary current and a broader cultural phenomenon or mood. Rejecting the conformism and stress on "normality" of the Truman and Eisenhower years, the Beats emphasized an **openness to varieties of experience** beyond the limits of middle-class society; they explored the cultural **"underground" of bebop jazz, drug use, "polymorphous perverse" sexuality, and non-Western religions**. What could be loosely described as the underlying philosophy was **visionary enlightenment, Zen Buddhism**. The Beat Generation were centred around the artist colonies of North Beach (San Francisco), Venice West (Los Angeles) and Greenwich Village (New York City). They rejected the prevailing academic attitude to poetry, feeling that poetry should be brought to the people. Readings would take place in the Coexistence Bagel Shop and Lawrence Ferlinghetti's City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco, often to the accompaniment of Jazz. A common theme that linked them all together was a rejection of the prevailing American middle-class values, the **purposelessness of modern society and the need for withdrawal and protest**.

# AMERICAN LITERATURE OF THE SECOND HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY

## MAJOR WRITERS

ALLEN GINSBERG – *The Howl*

JACK KEROUAC – *On the Road*

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## 3.2.2 OTHER POETIC MOVEMENTS

### FORMALISM

Major emphasis is on form rather than content. These poets were opposed to modernist innovations.

1940s and 1950s

HOWARD NEMEROV, RICHARD WILBUR, RANDALL JARRELL

### CONFESSIONAL POETRY

ROBERT LOWELL (1917–1977) His first and second books, *Land of Unlikeness* (1944) and *Lord Weary's Castle* (1947) were influenced by his conversion from Episcopalianism to Catholicism and explored the dark side of America's Puritanism. Lowell was politically active, opposing the Second World War and the war in Vietnam. He suffered from manic depression, for which he was repeatedly hospitalized.

Partly due to his frequent breakdowns, and partly due to the influence of the Beat generation poets, Lowell began to write more directly from personal experience as in his collection *Life Studies* (1959).

SYLVIA PLATH (1932–1963) When Sylvia was eight years old, her father died as a result of complications from diabetes. She studied with Robert Lowell. Her first collection of poems, *Colossus*, was published in 1960 in England, and two years later in the United States. She suffered from depressions, the result was her most famous book, *Ariel*.

In 1963, Plath published a semi-autobiographical novel, *The Bell Jar*.

Although only *Colossus* was published while she was alive, her husband, British poet Ted Hughes published three other volumes of her work posthumously, including *The Collected Poems*, which was the recipient of the 1982 Pulitzer Prize. She was the first poet to win a Pulitzer Prize after death.

ANNE SEXTON (1928-1974) In 1954 she was diagnosed with depression, suffered her first mental breakdown, and spent much of her time in a neuropsychiatric hospital. She

started writing poetry as a therapy. Her major themes included menstruation, abortion, and drug addiction.

#### BLACK MOUNTAIN SCHOOL

The Black Mountain School cantered around Black Mountain in North Carolina, where poets CHARLES OLSON, ROBERT DUNCAN, and ROBERT CREELEY taught in the early 1950s. The Black Mountain School is linked with Charles Olson's theory of "projective verse," which insisted on an open form based on the spontaneity of the breath pause in speech and the typewriter line in writing. Robert Creeley (1926–2005), who writes with a terse, minimalist style, was one of the major Black Mountain poets.

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#### POINTS TO REMEMBER

Major poetic schools: Formalism, Beat Generation, Confessional poetry, Blackmountain school

"Projective verse:" the poetic line should reflect on breath pauses in speech not given poetic form. The verse is based on natural rhythm, reflecting the breathing of the author.

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### 3.3 POSTWAR AMERICAN PROSE

After the war, there was a period named after one American senator, Joseph McCarthy. War became one of the main themes of American literature: Joseph Heller (1923–1999) *Catch 22*, Norman Mailer (1923) *The Naked and the Dead*, Herman Wouk (1915), *The Winds of War* and Irwin Shaw (1913–1984) *Young Lions* and Leon Uris (1924–2003) *Mila 15*. In the war novels written at that time, the enemy was not so much the fascists but the war and American army.

KURT VONNEGUT (1922-2007) became most famous for his satirical novels. Vonnegut's first novel, *Player Piano* (1952) is set in the future, where scientists and engineers of vast corporations attempt to automate everything. As a result, the functions of human beings are gradually taken over by machines. This work labelled Vonnegut as a science-fiction writer, although the author himself thought that he had written a novel about people and machines. Another important novel is the *Cat's Cradle* (1963) which is set on fictional island San Lorenzo in South America. There are two action lines: one follows a scientist who creates a chemical, Ice-Nine, that turns all water into ice. Absentmindedly he is responsible for the end of the world. The other one is a sharp criticism of dictatorship. Vonnegut explores

## AMERICAN LITERATURE OF THE SECOND HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY

destructive rationality of Western science and the turn towards mysticism, which was just then beginning to take hold among students in the USA and Europe.

The best known is *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969), which was based on his experience in Dresden, Germany, where he was a war prisoner during the destruction of the town in 1945. Later he was employed by the Germans to dig out corpses. Dresden was occupied in 1945 by Soviet troops and Vonnegut was repatriated to the United States. His main theme is the effects of technology on humanity. *Slaughterhouse Five, or the children's crusade* is written as a science fiction. He showed that science fiction can be a serious mainstream literature. He believed that no common words could express the terrors of the war. Vonnegut's other works include plays, essays, critics, and TV plays. His later novel is *Bluebeard* (1987). Vonnegut collected his essays in *A Man Without A Country* (2005).

E.L. DOCTOROW (1931–2015) a Jewish-American writer who is famous for his rewriting American history. He is combining fictional and real historical figures to bring back and recreate the political and social climate of that time. He concentrates mainly on the first half of the 20. century. Doctorow is the master of all genres but he is breaking their main rules. His first novel was an anti-western *Welcome to Bad Times*, 1960 filmed by Henry Fonda. It tells the story of colonization of the wild West. The first successful novel was *The Book of Daniel*, 1971. The whole story takes place within seven months in 1967. The protagonist, a historiographer is trying to find out why had been his parents executed. It is based on the real case of the Rosenbergs who were in the fifties executed on an electrical chair for participating in giving the information about atomic bomb to Soviet Union. The most famous novel is the *Ragtime*, 1975 filmed by Milos Forman. It is set between 1902 and the end of the WWI. It is a complex net of individual histories and relationships that are on one hand determined by the social and political context (the industrial growth, immigration, relationship to Afro-Americans) but on the other hand they determine the course of events of the time they live in. He uses the literary techniques of montage, he inserts news and newspaper articles in the text and experiments with narrative methods. It has a rhythm of ragtime music.

JOHN CHEEVER (1912-1982) is an American short story writer and novelist, called the "Chekhov of the suburbs". Cheever's main theme was the spiritual and emotional emptiness of life. He especially described manners and morals of middle-class, suburban America, with an ironic humour. He studied at Harvard University but was expelled for smoking. *The Stories of John Cheever* (1978) won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction, the National Books Critics Circle Award, and an American Book Award. He published most of his stories in the *New Yorker* similarly like Salinger. All his stories present a contrast between the peacefulness and respectability of the middle class suburban life and the emotional instability of the characters. Sometimes they revolt: the weak husbands against their hysterical and tyrannical wives, yet the revolt does not lead them to happiness.

VLADIMIR NABOKOV (1899-1977) Vladimir Nabokov was born in St. Petersburg into a wealthy, aristocratic family. In 1937 Nabokov moved to Paris. There he met the Irish novelist James Joyce. With a loan he received from the composer Rachmaninov, Nabokov

moved three years later with his wife and son to the United States. His novel, *Lolita*, became a literary bomb. The English writer Graham Greene cited it among the best books of 1955. With *Lolita* Nabokov gained a huge success, although it was banned in Paris in 1956-58 and not published in full in America and the U.K. until 1958.

*Lolita* is one of the most controversial novels of the 20th-century, in which the rhetoric of the protagonist both captivates and repels. The story deals with the desire of a middle-aged paedophile Humbert Humbert, the narrator, for a 12-year-old girl. Humbert keeps a prison-diary of his lifelong fascination with pubescent "nymphets". Stanley Kubrick directed the film version.

J(EROME) D(AVID) SALINGER (1919-2010) American novelist and short story writer. Salinger published one novel and several short story collections between 1948-59. He published two experimental novels that are interconnected: *Franny and Zooey* (1961), *Raise High The Roof Beam, Carpenters* (1963). His best-known work is *The Catcher In The Rye* (1951), a growing up novel. The novel took its title from a line by Robert Burns, in which the protagonist Holden Caulfield misquoting it sees himself as a 'catcher in the rye' who must keep the world's children from falling off 'some crazy cliff'. The story is written in a monologue and in lively slang. The humour of the novel places it in the tradition of Mark Twain's classical works, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, but its world-view is more disillusioned. Holden describes everything as 'phoney' and is constantly in search of sincerity.

TRUMAN CAPOTE (1924-1984) American novelist, short story writer, and playwright. His first novel, *Other Voices, Other Rooms* (1948), depicted a boy, Joel Knox, growing up in the Deep South. The book gained a wide success and created controversy because of its treatment of homosexuality. Capote wrote *Breakfast At Tiffany's* (1958). Its central character, Holly Golightly, is a young woman, who comes to New York seeking for happiness. She has a nameless cat and a brother named Fred. The narrator, an aspiring writer who has the same birthday as Capote (September 30), follows Holly's life, filled with colourful characters. The novel is constructed as a memory of events that happened about 15 years earlier. Holly has left the country before the end of the war, and the narrator has not seen her since. *Breakfast at Tiffany's* was made into a successful film, directed by Blake Edwards and starring Audrey Hepburn. Capote gained international fame with his "non-fiction novel" *In Cold Blood* (1966), an account of a real-life crime in which an entire family was murdered by two sociopaths.

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### POINTS TO REMEMBER

Major war writers: Heller (*Catch-22*), Mailer (*The Naked and the Dead*), Uris *Mila 15*

## AMERICAN LITERATURE OF THE SECOND HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY

Major themes: Psychological effects of war (Heller, Vonnegut), social criticism, relationship between man and machine (Vonnegut), American history (Doctorow).

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### 3.4 ETHNIC LITERATURES: AFRICAN AMERICAN AND AMERICAN JEWISH WRITING

#### 3.4.1 AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Between the wars, a large number of African Americans left the rural South and settled in big northern cities, like Chicago. Such migration created a strong base for the black Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s. Black writers were striving for the end of **segregation and racism**. The African American literature is defined by the struggle for social and cultural recognition. There was a growing interest in the works of Phyllis Wheatley and Zora Neal Hurston, as well as the slave narratives.

One of the first writers to do so was JAMES BALDWIN, whose work focused on race and sexuality. Baldwin is best known for his novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, examining what it was like to be both Black and gay at a time when neither of these identities was accepted by American culture. In all, Baldwin wrote nearly 20 books, including *Another Country* and collection of essays *The Fire Next Time*.

**RALPH ELLISON**: best known novel is *Invisible Man* (1952) was compared in its scope to Melville's *Moby-Dick*. Its nameless protagonist is invisible to the outside world, not as a human being. The protagonist's story reflects the political, social and cultural history of the African Americans.

**The Black Arts Movement**, led by political activist **AMIRI BARAKA** (born LeRoi Jones), was strengthened by the assassinations of the civil-rights leaders Malcolm X in 1965 and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968. It was often militant and political in promoting "Black Power" and black nationalist ideals. The Black Arts Movement emphasized vernacular and public performance. Most of the key figures, including **BARAKA**, **NIKKI GIOVANNI**, **JUNE JORDAN**, **HAKI MADHUBUTI** (born Don L. Lee), and **SONIA SANCHEZ**, were poets or dramatists. Their work continued into the 1970s, and several remain active in the twenty-first century.

**ALICE WALKER** (1944-) was born in Georgia. She participated in the student protests in the 1960s. She discovered the work of Zora Neal Hurston. She founded a new, more radical form of feminism, called Womanism. She wanted to depict the African American life as it is, including its dark and violent aspects. Her most famous novel was *The Color Purple* (1982). It was criticized by the African American critics and writers for showing the bleak

image of black families and communities. It is written in the form of letters. Filmed by Steven Spielberg.

Her main protagonists are African American women, the novels are full of violence, sex, racism, poverty but also female solidarity.

TONI MORRISON (1931) is the first African American Nobel Prize winner. Among her best known novels are *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Song of Solomon*, *Beloved*, *Jazz*, *Love and Mercy*. Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, was published in 1970. The book tells a story of a young African-American girl, Pecola Breedlove, who believes her life would be better if only she had blue eyes.

Her most acclaimed novel was *Beloved* (1987) which explores slavery, romance and the supernatural. Inspired by real character Margaret Garner, the protagonist Sethe, a former slave, is haunted by her decision to kill her children rather than see them become enslaved. Three of her children survived, but she killed her youngest daughter. Yet Sethe's daughter returns as a ghost who becomes an unrelenting presence in her home.

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### 3.4.2 AMERICAN JEWISH LITERATURE

There are three writers who became the most famous and most important Jewish

American writers after the war: SAUL BELLOW, BERNARD MALAMUD AND PHILIP ROTH.

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SAUL BELLOW (1915 –2015) was born in Canada and grew up in Chicago. He translated the most famous short story by I. B. Singer „Gimpel the Fool“. He became famous for his impersonal, intellectual style of his writing. He was influenced by Gustave Flaubert. In his works he is describing the changes in the world and the destruction of European civilization.

His themes were reflected already in his first novel, *The Dangling Man*, 1944. This novel was influenced by *Trial* by Franz Kafka. The protagonist is an average man, of no importance who is seized with war hysteria when he is waiting for his call up papers. Bellow concentrates on the interpersonal relationships during the time of war. Their inability to communicate rationally. The protagonist is happy to go to war because his moral ideals and traditional way of life were destroyed.

To his other important novels belong: *Dean's December* – in this novel he is contrasting the lie in totalitarian Romania and the ghettos in Chicago, where the blacks are dying in the street. In all of his novels he is dealing with the search for identity in the modern world. He describes how the tradition and background influences the life of his

## AMERICAN LITERATURE OF THE SECOND HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY

characters. Mostly he writes about intellectuals who are still looking for their place in modern society. He is contrasting the spiritual life and moral values with empty materialism. All of his novels are set in the modern world.

Other works: *Herzog*, *Mr. Sammler's Planet*.

BERNARD MALAMUD (1914–1986) was born in New York City to Russian-Jewish immigrant parents. In his second novel, *The Assistant* (1957), Malamud found his characteristic themes -- man's struggle to survive against all odds, and the ethical underpinnings of recent Jewish immigrants. Malamud's first published work was *The Natural* (1952), a combination of realism and fantasy set in the mythic world of professional baseball. Other novels include *A New Life* (1961), *The Fixer* (1966), *Pictures of Fidelman* (1969), and *The Tenants* (1971). He also was a prolific master of short fiction. Through his stories, in collections such as *The Magic Barrel* (1958), *Idiots First* (1963), and *Rembrandt's Hat* (1973), he conveyed -- more than any other American-born writer -- a sense of the Jewish present and past, the real and the surreal, fact and legend. Malamud's monumental work -- for which he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award -- is *The Fixer*.

Philip Roth (1933–2018) became famous with *Goodbye, Columbus* (1959). It consisted of a novella and five short stories and described the life of a Jewish middle-class family. Ten years later he published *Portnoy's Complaint*. In this "masturbation story" the narrator searches for freedom by using sex as his way of escape. From Malamud and Bellow, Roth has differed in a more ironic view of the lives of the Jews. Roth's memoir of his family, *Patrimony*, won the National Critics Circle Award in 1992. *THE HUMAN STAIN* (2000) was set in the 1990s at the height of the Clinton sex-scandal.

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### POINTS TO REMEMBER

Major themes of African American fiction: Slavery, family, community, race, oppression

Major themes of American Jewish fiction: family, Holocaust, assimilation, American Jewish community

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## 3.5 CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN PROSE

Due to the variety and large number of writers, this chapter will necessarily be limited and incomplete. Instead, it will provide a selection of influential authors.



CORMAC MCCARTHY was born in Rhode Island on July 20, 1933. His first novel was *The Orchard Keeper* (1965). McCarthy presents the rural south as a land of myth. His novel is set in an eastern Tennessee town called Red Branch, whose name recalls the great Red Branch Cycle of Celtic mythology.

In *All the Pretty Horses*, McCarthy opens his *Border Trilogy* with a coming of age story. Similarly to his novel *Blood Meridian*, this novel follows a young man's journey. John Grady Cole, confronts evil that grows out of his own ignorance and pride. His last most successful novel was *The Road* that was adapted into film.

ERNEST J. GAINES (b. January 15, 1933) is a prominent African-American fiction writer. He was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize for fiction for his 1993 novel, *A Lesson Before Dying*, which did win the National Book Critics Circle Award for fiction. In 2004, he was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature. Gaines was the eldest of 12 children, raised by his aunt, who was crippled and had to crawl to get around the house. Although born generations after the end of slavery, Gaines grew up impoverished, in old slave quarters on the plantation.

Gaines's first six years of school took place in the plantation church. A visiting teacher would teach him and the other children for five to six months of each year, depending on when the children were not picking cotton in the fields. Gaines's then spent three years at St. Augustine School, a Catholic school for African Americans in New Roads.

When he was fifteen, Gaines moved to Vallejo, California to join his mother and stepfather, who had left Louisiana during World War II. His first novel was written at age 17, while babysitting his youngest brother. According to one account, he wrapped it in brown paper, tied it with string, and sent it to a New York publisher, who rejected it. Gaines burned the manuscript, but later rewrote it to become his first published novel, *Catherine Carmier*.

Other works: *Mozart and Leadbelly: Stories and Essays* (2005), *A Lesson Before Dying* (1993), *A Gathering of Old Men* (1984) *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1971) *Bloodline* (1968) *Of Love and Dust* (1967)

JONATHAN SAFRAN FOER (1977-) comes from a Jewish background. He wrote his thesis about his maternal grandfather; Louis Safran who was a Holocaust survivor. He went to Ukraine to do research for his thesis which eventually turned into his first novel *Everything Is Illuminated* (2002). His second novel, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005) tells a story of a nine year old boy who lost his father in the 11th September attacks on the World Trade Centre. His third book and first non-fiction work, *Eating Animals* was published in 2009.

ART SPIGELMAN (1948-) is an author and illustrator who became mainly famous for his Holocaust graphic novel *Maus*, where he retold the wartime experience of his parents Vladek and Anja, survivors of Auschwitz. In 1980 he cofounded *Raw*, an underground comic anthology. He wanted to present graphic novels and "comix" (comics written for a

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mature audience) to a wider public. Spiegelman is a part of the story as the adult Artie Spiegelman, who tries to understand and reconstruct his parents' past while coping with his mother's suicide, his aging and often difficult father, and his own sense of guilt. The two *Maus* volumes were translated into more than 20 languages, and they were published together as *The Complete Maus* in 1996.

In 2000 Spiegelman started *Little Lit*, a comics anthology for children that includes from comics creators Chris Ware, Neil Gaiman, and Daniel Clowes, and Lemony Snicket. He was inspired by the events of Sept. 11, 2001, to return to the comix format and published *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004), broadsheet-sized meditations on mortality and the social and political consequences of that day. In 2008 he released *Breakdowns: Portrait of the Artist as a Young %@&\*!*, his graphic memoir.

SHERMAN ALEXIE (1966-) was born in Wellpinit, Spokane Indian Reservation. He left the reservation to attend an all-white high school and captured his experience in *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007). He also wrote poetry *The Summer of Black Widows*, and the thriller *Indian Killer*. His stories are collected in *The Toughest Indian in the World* (2000). *Blasphemy* (2012) collected new and previously published short stories. In 2017 Alexie published a memoir *You Don't Have to Say You Love Me*, in which he chronicled his complex relationship with his mother.

JHUMPA LAHIRI (1967-) born in London but her Bengali parents soon moved to Rhode Island. Her first collection of stories was *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999). Lahiri's characters are often immigrants from India or children of immigrants who deal with issues of cultural displacement, marital troubles and issues of identity. Most of these stories are set in the United States. Her first novel *The Namesake* was published in 2003. Her characters deal mainly with cultural and generational gaps. Gogol Ganguli, the novel's protagonist, is a young man negotiating the divide between his parents' traditional Indian roots and his own American identity.

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### POINTS TO REMEMBER

Major representatives: J. S. Foer, Art Spiegelman, Jhumpa Lahiri, Cormac McCarthy

Major themes: The past, Holocaust, September 11, , European history, family, Holocaust, guilt, Intergeneration gap, clash of cultures, displacement, ecology

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### STUDY GUIDE

In LMS Moodle you will find texts with study questions related to this era, marked as TEXT 9-13. Please read them and try to answer the questions, you can use the questions as a guide to your reading. The text analysis will be carried out in class.

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### **SUMMARY**



This chapter introduces major trends and movements in American literature in the second half of the 20th century.

It focuses on essential movements and their representatives in the context of American history and culture. Firstly, it introduces major genres and features of postwar prose, including the war fiction. It further discusses major movements in postwar poetry, mainly the Beat generation, Confessional poetry, and Blackmountain school of poetry. It also addresses postwar African American literature, Jewish American literature and The contemporary writers.

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### **QUESTIONS: CHAPTER 3**



1. What were the major themes in the postwar drama? Name at least two representatives of postwar drama and their major works.
  2. What were the major characteristics of the Beat Movement?
  3. What were the major characteristics of the Confessional poetry?
  4. Name at least three war writers and their major works.
  5. Name the three major representatives of African American literature and their major works
  6. Name the three major representatives of American Jewish literature and their major works.
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## AMERICAN LITERATURE OF THE SECOND HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY



### ANSWERS: CHAPTER 1

1. Periplus, sermons, diaries, chronicles, Indian captivity narratives, poetry.
  2. They were members of the religious reform movement in the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> century influenced by Calvinism. They believed that God, not the king or Pope is the head of Church. They believed in predestination. Anne Bradstreet, Edward Taylor, Michael Wigglesworth.
  3. Captain John Smith.
  4. Gothic novel (Brown), Adventure novel, frontier novel (Cooper), historical tales and short stories (Irving).
  5. Poe, Whitman, Dickinson. Poe: melodic and musical rhymed poetry, features of Dark Romanticism: emphasis on torn and mentally disturbed protagonist, often featuring motifs like death, sorrow, melancholy. – Whitman: free verse, democratic poetry, optimistic, embracing America as a whole. – Dickinson: short, terse poems, typographical experiments (dashes, capital letters).
  6. Low-class characters, failure of American dream, hostile environment, no freedom of choice. Urbanization, industrialization, Darwin, Freud, Marx.
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### ANSWERS: CHAPTER 2

1. Urbanization, industrialization, feminism, world wars, immigration, mass culture. New poetics, experiments with form, unrhymed poetry, allusions to European culture (Pound and Eliot, Williams)
2. See the parts Definition: Image, Definition: Three principles of Imagism
3. To create African American cultural and literary tradition, incorporate music, especially jazz and blues into poetry (Hughes), to question the influence of race upon writing (Toomer, Cullen), to raise awareness of the lives of African American women (Hurstun).
4. Southern tradition, Civil war, family, community, the land, history and the past, race. Poe, "Raven", Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, William Faulkner, *Sound and Fury*, Mitchell *Gone with the Wind* (you can choose other writers as well).

**ANSWERS: CHAPTER 3**

1. Fascism, Civil War (Hellman), falsity of American dream (Miller), innocence versus reality (Williams); Williams, *Streetcar Named Desire*, Miller, *All My Sons*.
  2. Protest against mainstream culture, liberalism, political activism, ecology, non-Western religions.
  3. Depression, poetry as a therapy, personal issues, taboo topics such as abortion, drug abuse.
  4. Major war writers: Heller (*Catch-22*), Mailer (*The Naked and the Dead*), Uris *Mila 15*
  5. Morrison (*Beloved*), Ellison (*Invisible Man*), Walker (*The Color Purple*)
  6. Bellow (*Herzog*), Malamud (*Assistant, Fixer*), Roth (*The Human Stain*).
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Poetry Foundation: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org>.

## SHRnutí STUDIjNÍ OPORY

Tato studijní opora slouží jako stručné představení americké literatury od počátku do současnosti. Vzhledem k širokému tematickému záběru představuje výběr zásadních literárních směrů a hnutí a jejich hlavních představitelů. První kapitola představuje vývoj americké literatury od jejích koloniálních počátků do konce 19. století. Zahrnuje období revoluce a vzniku národní americké literatury v díle Washingtona Irvinga aj.F. Coopera, představuje počátky americké povídky, poezie a románu, a vysvětluje vznik realismu a naturalismu.

Druhá kapitola se věnuje americké literatuře v první polovině 20. století, zaměřuje se především na modernismus v poezii i próze a představuje i tzv. Ztracenou generaci. Třetí, poslední kapitola se zabývá vývojem americké literatury po druhé světové válce až do současnosti. Jednotlivé podkapitoly představují nejvýznamnější básnická hnutí a dramatickou tvorbu. Nejvíce pozornosti je věnováno vývoji prózy od konce druhé světové války do současnosti, kde je zahrnuta i etnická literatura.

## PŘEHLED DOSTUPNÝCH IKON

	Čas potřebný ke studiu		Cíle kapitoly
	Klíčová slova		Nezapomeňte na odpočinek
	Průvodce studiem		Průvodce textem
	Rychlý náhled		Shrnutí
	Tutoriály		Definice
	K zapamatování		Případová studie
	Řešená úloha		Věta
	Kontrolní otázka		Korespondenční úkol
	Odpovědi		Otázky
	Samostatný úkol		Další zdroje
	Pro zájemce		Úkol k zamyšlení



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