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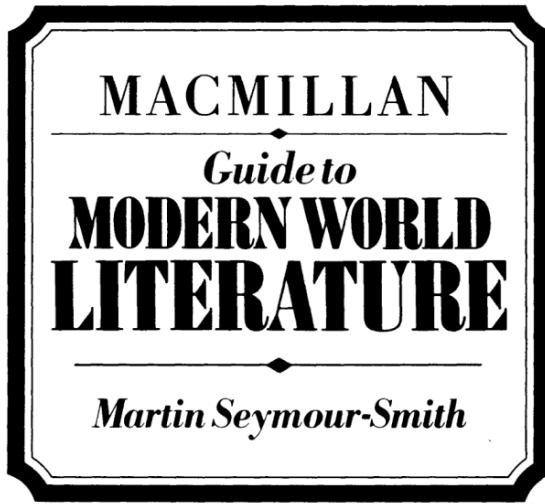
*Guide to*

**MODERN WORLD  
LITERATURE**

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*Martin Seymour-Smith*

Macmillan Reference Books



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Macmillan Reference Books

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The third edition took much longer than I had intended, quite often because I was obstinately determined to acquaint myself more thoroughly with a literature, or even the works of a particular author, than I had heretofore been; this meant that many suffered whilst I was entranced (if getting broker). I realise that this is my life, rather than that of the sufferers, and I apologise to all of them, not least to my wife, who has always, and understandably, regarded me with (almost) silent despair. Another who has regarded me with a despair, necessarily not so silent, has been my editor, Penelope Allport. All I can say about my gratitude to her for her tact and wiles is that I should never have completed this task without them.

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Fortuneswell  
1 July 1984

Martin Seymour-Smith

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# Introduction

## I

The scope of this book – which would have been more openly read by certain ‘literary professionals’ had I been able to be more naïve – extends to writers, of all nationalities, who survived 31 December 1899. In certain instances (e.g. Hopkins, Mallarmé) I have had, for obvious reasons, to discuss writers who died before that; but I have strictly limited these. The cut-off date is of course as artificial as it is necessary; but I have tried to make it as little so as possible. I have given an account of the major and most of the minor literary movements of the past century and a half; the names of these will be found in the index. The system of putting ‘q.v.’ after names of literary movements, philosophers, authors and titles of books is intended to be a practical aid to the reader: if he turns to the index he will find the main entry he requires. This should make cross-reference quick and simple.

Complete accuracy in a comprehensive work such as this is, alas, impossible: errors of dating are repeated from reference book to reference book; it is frequently impossible to check the dates of first publication of books without seeing the original editions. . . . I have made every effort to give correct information (e.g. my dates of birth for Tennessee Williams and E. Lasker-Schüler differ from most authorities, but are right). I shall be glad to correct any errors, with acknowledgements, in future editions – as I have done in this third and completely revised edition, which is for the most part rewritten. There is much new matter.

The dates given for dramatic works are usually of publication, not first production.

Dates after individual books are of earliest publication, wherever or in whatever form this took place. The list of abbreviations consists mainly of books in which translations – into the question of whose merits I do not enter – into English of works by writers discussed in the text are conveniently available. It cannot pretend to completeness, since more and more such collections are being published each year; all libraries and book-shops in large cities stock them. Not all books listed are currently in print.

Unsigned translations are my own.

The emphasis, since in the interests of space – even though this edition is twice as long as those of 1973 and 1976 – I have had to place emphases, is on the more universal areas of interest and language-knowledge (English, German, French, Spanish, Russian, Italian); and on the earlier rather than the later part of the period, which may less surely be assessed. But I have discussed some authors I believe to be neglected or misunderstood or underrated (e.g. George Moore, Céline, Ford) at length; and two great literatures that are neglected, at least in Great Britain, the Japanese and the Catalan, have received a fuller treatment.

The book as a whole 'lacks' a 'systematic thesis'. This has annoyed some. But its 'thesis' is literature, which is mysterious and anti-systematic and elusive of ownership (especially of university teachers, as some know). Some will note certain abrupt changes of mind between this and earlier versions about a number of authors. In my view anyone who clung on to their own (often ignorant) interpretations for the sake of doing so would be unfit to write a book. My views of literature are always changing as I seek to diminish my ignorance of it – and so are the readers'! I offer this book not in a 'teaching' spirit but in one of candid sharing. My readers' various views are in reality as 'strong' as my own, but he/she may not be as used to airing them. . . . Doubtless all views are shortcomings, but, unaided, they can become worse than that: something authoritarian. I give you mine, and that is an end to it. For those who dislike them, there is much information, too, and information about information.

## II

All Western literature has developed, with some national exceptions and variations, to a consistent pattern. In the succeeding brief sketch I have kept definitions as broad as possible: our understanding of literature does not benefit from attempts to narrow down the meaning of terms too precisely: the terms themselves lose their value. They are very useful, but become abstract when allowed to dominate individual achievement. Literature is generated by women and men, not by movements.

By the mid-century realism, particularly in the novel, was well established. Realism in its broadest sense is an essential aim of any work of literature: it simply means verisimilitude to actuality – and points to the aspects of life the author selects as meaningful. But this leaves entirely open the question of how actuality is regarded – as an outward or an inward phenomenon, or both, or whatever. Nineteenth-century realism, the method out of which modern literature developed, does, even though it remains one of the broader literary concepts, have a less vague connotation.

First, realism is essentially a part of romanticism – however much it may sometimes look like a reaction against it, and however certainly the romantic movement may have seemed, in the positivist Fifties, to have collapsed. We are still living in a romantic period – nor, indeed, will there ever be any return to the limitations and artificialities of classicism, which now does no more than reassert itself every so often as a necessary curb to romantic excess or, of course, to laziness and silliness which is ubiquitous but no part of the subject of this book. True literature is 'given', in the first place – that is an essentially romantic notion – but the vast extent of the hard work and 'art' to which this 'given' literature has to be subjected is very well known to writers, if not to their inferior imitators.

Realism has no significant relationship to the literary classicism of antiquity or to the neo-classicism of the eighteenth century. It originates in the age-old tendency towards accuracy of representation (usually manifesting itself as an anti- or non-classical depiction of plebeian life – Cervantes, Jonson, Shakespeare, Smollett – or as regionalism, in Spanish *costumbrismo*), and in philosophical empiricism and all proto-pragmatic or proto-utilitarian inclinations. Nineteenth-century realism, at various times and in various writers, exhibited the following characteristics: objectivity (in the sense of concentration on facts rather than on interpretations of them); lucidity (rather than style or rhetoric); 'ordinary' quotidian experience; a search for an immediate, verifiable truth, even if this be no more than relativistic; secularism; emphasis on the psychological motivations of

the characters, often but certainly not always at the expense of 'plot'. In general the good realist authors (for example, George Eliot, Howells, Henry James, qq.v.) had good, or even idealistic intentions towards their audience; but they refused to uplift their hearts, thus raising false hopes. A few realists (to some extent Flaubert; certainly Maupassant) had more aggressive intentions towards the bourgeois. (Bad intentions towards the bourgeois, which term I use in this book in the specifically Flaubertian – not Marxian – sense, are a characteristic of modern literature, and in so far as the bourgeois read it they have bad intentions towards themselves – but then most writers, too, are bourgeois in this sense of the word, and so know about being bourgeois even if intolerant of *sottise*. If a guide to this guide were required, it would be Flaubert's warm-hearted but crushing *Bouvard et Pécuchet* – and the dictionary of accepted ideas which accompanies it.) But the milieu chosen was emphatically middle-class.

In many countries (but most notably in France) realism turned into naturalism. This term is frequently used, particularly by journalists and reviewers of plays (but also by critics who should know better) as a synonym for realism. This is seriously misleading. Naturalism is a more precise term than realism: a narrowing-down of it. (Zola's programme – described in the account of him – is entirely naturalist; his practice is not.) Naturalist fiction is guided, or thinks it is guided, by the principles of scientific determinism. This arose largely from 'Darwinism', a movement or climate of thought that has less connection with Charles Darwin, from whom it derives its name, than might seem apparent. Darwin had in fact given a new and viable interpretation of the theory of transformism; according to 'Darwinism' he invented and 'proved' it. Actually it went back, as a theory, to at least 550 BC. The naturalists extracted from Darwinism the notion of man-as-animal, of his life as a bloody struggle (they could have found this more definitely and confidently stated in Hobbes' *Leviathan*, as distinct from hypothetically in Darwin; but Darwin seemed scientifically respectable) – 'the strongest, the swiftest and the cunningest live to fight another day', said T.H. Huxley. This persistent fallacy has been given the name of 'Social Darwinism'. In point of fact the 'fittest' may be neither strong, nor swift, nor cunning. . . . The lives of the poor, to the depiction of which the naturalists turned, gave ample justification for such a view. However, in practice the best naturalists (e.g. Zola, Dreiser) have transcended their deterministic programmes. Zola is as romantic as he is naturalistic, and Dreiser is massively puzzled as well as occasionally sentimental: both are naturalists, it is true; but both gain their ultimate effects from their power of psychological penetration.

The so-called neo-romanticism, and then decadence, that manifested itself in nearly all the Western literatures between about 1885 and 1905 was not as remote from either realism or naturalism as may have seemed apparent at the time.

All great literary movements initially offend, are then accepted, later dominate, and finally decline. They all eventually deteriorate: into preciosity, over-aestheticism, over-self-consciousness, trivial scholarship, cultivation of debility and, of course, whatever society may at the time determine as perverse behaviour. . . . The decadent movement (it is really more of a tendency) at the end of the nineteenth century is sometimes called *fin de siècle*, a term I have occasionally employed. It is as much a development, or etiolation, of Parnassianism and Symbolism (both these terms are fully discussed in the section on French literature) as a reaction against positivism and the overtly 'scientific' elements in naturalism. But the effective naturalists were of course more than a little *fin de siècle*, as may be seen in their relish in squalor and decay. And there is nothing whatever 'scientific' about the Bosch-like vivacity of Zola's Rabelaisian crowd scenes. . . .

Symbolism had contained the religious or 'Platonic' impulses inherent in human beings, never completely submergeable, during the realist-naturalist period. The deca-

dent writers – they range from the only partly decadent, like Verlaine, to the wholly decadent, like Dowson – were nearly all ‘religious’ (if only in the sense that they embraced ‘Satanism’ or aspects of it, and died incense-sniffing Catholics). But they viewed civilization as a decay rather than growth: they worshipped entropy, degeneration, disorder; they transformed the romantic cult of the individual into the romantic-decadent cult of the self (narcissism) – hence their interest in or cultivation of homosexuality. They made a cult of the erotic and hurled themselves into hopeless loves. They worshipped the urban and the ugliness it offered – but in a deliberately perverse spirit. They romanticized the then dominant principle of the Second Law of Thermodynamics (‘The Heat Death of the Universe’), seeing it as operative in the evolutionary sphere. They were neurasthenic and deliberately hysterical, and even liked to be blind, syphilitic, consumptive or maimed (though not too much if possible). The mood and the depressive stance persist.

The foregoing are the chief characteristics of decadence in general; no single writer manifests all of them – except, possibly, some entirely trivial one. In its least extreme form this neo-romantic spirit began to pervade the works of realists and naturalists – for example, as I have already remarked, Zola’s novels are increasingly full of deliberate symbolization.

In the course of literary history movements (or tendencies) provoke reactions to themselves; but these reactions absorb the essences, the genuine discoveries, of the movements that have engendered them. To give an over-simple illustration: romanticism at its best contains the essence of classicism. The best neo-romantic writers had learned the important lessons of realism. And it was essentially from neo-romanticism, a sort of romantic revival and confirmation of the original romantic recovery from the eighteenth-century rationalism, that modernism arose. Literature is now, broadly, romantic; but critics – non-creative critics – tend towards positivism. It is a pity that so much criticism arises from an envy of creativity, but it is absolutely vital to understand that this is so. Too often the categories and over-systemizations of critics are a defensive strategy: to take away literature, with its vitality, from the reader by intimidating him/her. This book is certainly written in an attempt to return literature to its real ownership: to the creative and responsible reader, to whom one may confess one’s preferences, but for whom it is sinful to prescribe. Without such readers there would be nothing: everything would lack energy.

Expressionism, which I have fully described in the section on German literature, was a specifically German movement. However, literary modernism can most usefully be described as expressionism: every modern movement after Symbolism (which was in any case nineteenth-century in origin) may conveniently be described as a form of expressionism. It must also be remembered that inasmuch as expressionism really implies ‘inside out’ – i.e. the expression of inner emotion in ‘outer’ terms – so a vast quantity of all literature, of the past as much as of the present, is in that sense ‘expressionist’. Many passages in Shakespeare are expressionist. There is seldom anything completely new about ‘new’ movements. The drama as a whole – it could be argued – is essentially expressionist. There is a strong case for making this a generic term to be applied to all literature. Even vigorous narratives (as in Homer) have their phenomenological equivalents.

Modernism, which often arouses great hostility, has a number of characteristics (the writer who combines every one of them in his work is likely to be a charlatan). Realism remains committed – more or less subtly – to a mimetic theory: literature is an imitation, a photograph, of life. Modernism (in the sense used in this book) is fundamentally non- or anti-mimetic. In its extremest form, modernism may resolutely omit what is ‘essential’ in societal, communal or simply representational terms. On the other hand, it

will stress precisely what is 'unessential' in such terms. This amounts to an emphasis on inner life, and therefore on the life of the individual (cf expressionism). Causality, carefully observed in the nineteenth century, may be deliberately deleted. This does not mean, of course, that it is rejected. It means that it is not an essential part of what the modernist writer is trying to say, or that, at the least, it is not what he/she wants to put emphasis on.

I should explain that the term mimetic, from mimesis, is of necessity used unobtrusively when it is simply linked to crude realist aspirations. In Auerbach's *Mimesis* the fragmentation of exterior action that has taken place in fiction is seen, fruitfully although often too obscurely, as an essentially mimetic process. That it is such can be very persuasively argued. But we must retain the less subtle distinction between 'photographic' intentions (or expectations), which are simplistic, and 'expressionist' ones, which are not. Much popular literature (pseudo-romantic or 'horror' pulp: *Gone With the Wind* is paradigmatic, for all its sick skill: it manipulates reality in the interests of cash and quick, easy gratification) is simply photographic in intention: it makes the absurd assumption that a narrative can represent life like a photograph which itself only seems to represent what was in the viewfinder of the camera that took it. The assumptions behind 'photographic realism' call for a descriptive unobtrusiveness to match them. . . . We see this unobtrusiveness at its most ugly in the contortions of the wealthy spinner of yarns and manipulated fantasies (e.g. Wouk, Le Carré) when faced with the suspicion that the quality of their work may not be so high as their bank balances; under these unhappy circumstances this kind of writer will even play at being 'modernist' – the late Richard Llewellyn, author of *How Green Was My Valley*, provides a good example of this phenomenon. But anything can happen in literature, and very occasionally (it is very rare) even the purveyor of pulp may have a sort of genius. So it is safest to assert only this: that when merely 'photographic' assumptions are implicit, so is bad faith and ill will. It is easy to see that the great realists of the nineteenth century were by no means merely photographic in their assumptions, even if they did assume the total effectiveness of mimesis. Their imaginations knew very well that they could not take photographs of society. But they chose the photographic method as the most effective metaphor at their disposal. In every case of greatness there is an extra-photographic element in the achievement: in Dickens, a proto-Kafkaesque (q.v.), vitality; in George Eliot, a brooding moral fervour; in Gissing (q.v.), a drabness of atmosphere that is so severe it is richly suggestive. . . .

Modernism as a term is both descriptive and prescriptive; it is also in part whatever you want it to be ('bad', for such old-fashioned critics as F.L. Lucas or Graham Hough; 'good', for 'progressive' critics). Descriptively one can say that modernism is rebellious, anti-traditional, against whatever the ethical norm may be, nihilistic, anti-aesthetic so far as the tradition that is being challenged is pro-aesthetic, primitive (that is why Lévi-Strauss is chic – a matter not relevant to his merits), perverse in the sense that the challenged tradition is normal, and so forth. Modernism is also new – for new's sake. All this is necessary process and has been going on since literature became a self-conscious activity: one divorced, in the minds of its makers and its consumers, from religion and from folklore. But that process was not always subsumed under the name of modernism, with its implication of 'new'. The idea of the new for the sake of the 'new and better' (which is an error) is a relatively recent development: a substitute for the loss of belief, when the sense of that loss became general. The idea of the new then became godlike for many people.

But since the Enlightenment challenge to belief and to the traditional status quo, that status quo has looked increasingly silly and insecure. The game of politics has fallen into disrepute – as Machiavelli perhaps ironically prophesied it would (if he did not, then the

'Machiavel' who so much delighted Marlowe and others of his age certainly did). The idea of a valid order residing in life as it is lived at official level is no longer acceptable. There is a sense of hopelessness at the top, as is the case with members of governments: a good example of this is given by the decision of the Church of England to reject its own liturgy in favour of one written in a mixture of cockney and bureaucratese, thus also rejecting such very distinguished members of itself as C.H. Sisson (q.v.), who has written a scathing book trying to explain why he now has nowhere to go. The wife of the head of this establishment has been quoted in the press as saying that her husband is not 'too religious'. It is a secular age, and one which offers itself as a hopeless sacrificial victim to satirists, were there any of these. . . .

The validly modernistic looks back into the ancient past to discover 'new' connections between the individual and the world. The validly modernistic recognizes change, but rejects progress. The validly modernistic rejects pseudo-modernistic inanity as mere socio-anthropological manifestation ('happenings', the now outdated silliness of the enterprise that was the *nouveau roman*, q.v.); but it accepts the need to set up situations which force people to look into themselves for new values. Realism was the last non-modernistic movement in literature. But it contained the seeds of modernism: when it shaded off into naturalism it began to challenge the status quo. The naturalists thought that they were taking up the values of the scientists, and so, to a certain extent, they were; but they soon transcended them, in the ways I have demonstrated in this book.

The fully-fledged modernisms which followed naturalism had of necessity to flout all established conventions: forms, rules, causality (as described above), conventional character development and the like. History itself has not allowed them to recover from that, so to say, blow to the artistic in themselves. But in fact no valid, no meaningful book (or painting or piece of music) has been entirely chaotic. The imagination generates its own forms, and it is hardly surprising that these forms should partake, for the most part, of myth. In our ending, in these final years of doom and decline, it seems, is our beginning. It makes for a not unexciting inner life.

Another important aspect of modernist writing — and one which puzzles many of its readers, for whom 'time' remains, consciously, a means of manipulating reality into acceptable forms — is its jettisoning of conventional chronology. I have explained this at some length in my treatment of the French *nouveau roman* (q.v.)

It is here that the French philosopher, Henri Bergson, is relevant. Bergson did not 'discover' either unconventional time or stream-of-consciousness; but his philosophy reflected much contemporary thinking. Bergson is part of the neo-romantic reaction against positivism; he also complements the phenomenology of the German philosopher Husserl (discussed with the French *nouveau roman*) inasmuch as he concentrates upon the concrete rather than the abstract (Husserl was not himself at all interested in this problem; but the effect of his work has been to draw attention to perceptual actualities). It is appropriate that Bergson, although not an imaginative writer, should have received the Nobel Prize for Literature (1928): his influence on literature has been wide and deep. He demanded a return to the 'immediate data of consciousness', and he believed that this could be grasped by means of what he called 'intuition'. Like a number of modern novelists he saw character not as 'personality' but as a process of ceaseless becoming.

The actual term stream-of-consciousness originated with Henry James' brother William James (q.v.). Stream-of-consciousness fiction tends to lay emphasis on pre-verbal types of experience; by implication, therefore, this type of fiction regards internal experience as more 'important' than external. (However, stream-of-consciousness can be used simply as an extension of realist technique: the fact that mental minutiae are recorded is not in itself guarantee of a phenomenological approach.) Bergson's attitude was similar:

for him consciousness was duration (*la durée*); intellect conceptualizes this flow into something static; intuition thinks in duration. Sartre (q.v.) has summarized Bergson's position well: 'on going into the past an event does not cease to be; it merely ceases to act and remains "in its place" at its date for eternity. In this way being has been restored to the past, and it is very well done; we even affirm that duration is a multiplicity of interpenetration and that the past is continually organized with the present'.

Bergson is important above all for his anti-intellectuality and his continual suggestion of new ways of seeing ourselves in the world. 'There is one reality, at least', he wrote, 'which we all seize from within, by intuition and not by simple analysis. It is our own personality in its flowing through time — our self which endures.' The relevance of this to the work of Proust (q.v.) is immediately clear.

### III

I have referred throughout to a number of concepts, or used certain terms, or made somewhat persistent reference to certain themes which require initial definition, or explanation. Before this, though, I should add that my use of these concepts has been, throughout, deliberately simplistic. There is nothing that is useful that has not been over-analysed by academics, if not trivialized by literary journalists. The concepts I have chosen I have chosen for their usefulness. Most of the questions they here beg are dealt with, if not always answered, in the course of the book itself.

#### \*

I have categorized some writers as naïve and others as sentimentive. In 1795 Goethe's friend and contemporary, the German poet, dramatist and critic Friedrich Schiller, published his essay *On Naïve and Sentimentive Poetry* (*Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*) — I have followed the sensible practice of translating 'sentimentalische' as 'sentimentive'; 'naïve' is misleading, too, but 'simple' does not help; 'sentimentive' is less hopelessly misleading, if only because less familiar, than 'sentimental'. This great essay has not had, in the English-speaking world, the recognition that it deserves. Of all the familiar antitheses — the antique and modern of Schlegel, Dionysian and Apollonian of Nietzsche (q.v.), classical and baroque of Wolfflin — it is the most fruitful. However, the questions of Schiller's exact intentions, and of its significance in its time, are not relevant here. What I have done is to borrow Schiller's terms and to simplify them for the purposes of this book. For, even in my modified and restricted usage, they convey indispensable information that is not contained in the more familiar romantic-classic opposition.

For Schiller the naïve poet is one who is in perfect harmony with nature — with, indeed, the universe; his personality cannot be found in his poetry. He may even seem 'repulsive', 'callous', 'invisible'. The sentimentive poet, on the other hand, has lost his contact with and even his faith in nature, for which he yearns. Naïve poetry (Schiller says) is characteristic of the ancients: an immediate, inspired, detailed representation of the sensuous surface of life. In sentimentive poetry the author is everywhere present; he is self-conscious. The object does 'not possess him utterly'.

*On Naïve and Sentimentive Poetry* was originally prompted by the example of Goethe, whom Schiller saw, as he saw Shakespeare, as a serene and naïve poet born out of his time. It was Goethe, too, who made the most profound comment on the essay: '... he plagued himself with the design of perfectly separating sentimentive from naïve poetry. ... As if ... sentimentive poetry could exist at all without the naïve ground in which ... it has its root.' One notes Goethe's effortless wisdom as one notes Schiller's tormented and intellectual struggle with himself. Yet both styles of being are equally exemplary.

Schiller was contrasting the objective (naïve) poetry written in the early (progressive) stages of a culture, and the subjective (self-conscious, sentimentive) poetry written in its decline. (If cultures do flourish and decline, and they appear to do so, then our culture is certainly in a state of decline – a flourishing culture cannot throw up a crop of 'horror writers'.) Goethe, again, summed the matter up: 'All eras in a state of decline and dissolution are subjective ... all progressive eras have an objective tendency.' Thus, in the poetry of Shakespeare there is a centrifugal tendency (called 'healthy' by Goethe), an inwards-outwards movement; in most of the poetry of Schiller's contemporaries, and more of that of our century, there is a centripetal tendency, an outwards-inwards movement.

Now Schiller wished to justify his own kind of (sentimentive) poetry in the light of what he felt to be Goethe's naïve poetry. As I have remarked, his precise concerns and (in particular) his programme need not and indeed could not — in this context — be ours.

Here I mean by the naïve writer the writer whose inspiration is above all drawn from his unsophisticated, uncomplicated, direct view of the universe. His view is uncluttered by intellectualization. The naïve writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been poor thinkers — this is a point of which I have made a good deal. Hardy, Dreiser and Sherwood Anderson (for example) were all writers of great power — but poor as thinkers. (True, Anderson was something of a sage: but sages are not thinkers.) The naïve writer does not proceed by thought. The phenomenon can still only be explained by recourse to Schiller's distinction. And even where a writer — Pablo Neruda, pioneer random explorer of the unconscious, comes immediately to mind — neither wants nor tries to 'think', Schiller's essay immediately enriches our understanding.

I mean by the sentimentive writer — but always bearing in mind Goethe's stipulation that no work that has not roots in the naïve has any creative status — the writer who is sophisticated, trained in thinking, self-conscious. Thomas Mann is perhaps the prime example in the twentieth century. And more than one critic has found Mann a highly suspect 'great writer' ...

Of course there is no such thing as a purely naïve writer— any more than there can be a purely sentimentive writer. The last naïve writer was Homer, if Homer existed; but even these works are not wholly naïve. But this applies to the romantic-classical opposition as well. Schiller's distinction is essential; and very important for our time. It reveals not only how the naïve writer (e.g. Hauptmann, q.v.) can wreck and corrupt his work and himself by betraying his impulses, but also how sentimentive writing is becoming increasingly sterile as it draws cunningly away from the naïve; it reveals, too, the nature of the doubts which wrack the sentimentive writer. Astonishingly, there still are a few (a very few) naïve writers. Andrew Young (q.v.) was a wholly naïve poet, though of an older generation; and he wrote little that was really good in the post-war years. James Hanley (q.v.) is perhaps the last naïve novelist in English and is over eighty. But the present has belonged for the most part to the increasingly beleaguered sentimentive writer. A Patrick White (q.v.) can just transcend the grand pretentiousness in his work; but even a William Golding – let alone a Durrell (qq.v.) – cannot. The purely meretricious (and I should not like to say this of Durrell, given his poetry), such as Fowles (q.v.), thrive on the unhappy conflict. But the

wheel has come almost full circle. Once the sentimentive writer was simply modernist; now it is the turn of this kind of writer to be modernist by searching for naïvety (in the Schillerian sense of it)! Myth, dream, belief, affirmation: all these things so reprehensible to the sullen, pseudo-certain positivist mind, saturated as it is with journalistic triviality, are now as 'offensive' as the truly modern was fifty and more years ago. Then Joyce's *Ulysses* (q.v.) shocked and horrified 'traditionalists': the book had to be fought for. Now the very people who take it for granted, as orthodox, are themselves shocked by the lyrical or the genuinely naïve! Emotion has become embarrassing, the feminine absurd. Some substantial part of 'feminism' consists of women's rejection of their own femininity.

The contrast I have occasionally made between 'direct' and 'oblique' poetry is slightly different, although the antithesis is of a similar nature. Clearly direct poetry tends to the naïve, while oblique tends to the sentimentive. Yet the direct poet such as Williams (q.v.) may, in his intellectually bewildered shiftings and juxtapositions of his blocks of poster colour, conceal wistful sentimentive longings. . . . The case of Saint-John Perse (q.v.) gives cause for thought here: is he sentimentive trying to look naïve, or genuinely naïve? Is he direct, or oblique but looking direct? How much cunning is there in his work?



I have very often spoken of works having 'middlebrow' appeal. This is a dangerous but essential concept in an age that is desperate to reject the wildness of the imagination by absorbing it (hence literary prizes, government-sponsored culture-feasts, and so on). One of the chief features of the truly middlebrow literature is that, however 'tragic' or 'modern' it may seem, it consists of material manipulated to satisfy the conscious desires of a pseudo-cultured audience: an audience that still thinks of the world-as-it-is as essentially the best; an audience of individuals who, in varying degrees, reject their endogenous suffering ('decent', externally prompted grief is allowed: in midcult novels relatives die young, girls get raped or crippled, babies are murdered by 'beasts' and/or so on, and it is 'very sad'): that suffering they experience as a result of their failure to attain authenticity. Middlebrow literature is, in Sartre's (q.v.) existentialist sense, slimy, viscous: it helps us to remain filthy swine (*salauds*). Some middlebrow literature is apparently avant garde; at its worst it may not even be intended for reading, but simply for display (hence the phrase 'coffee-table book'). 'Very difficult' books come into this category. The great midcult successes are seldom, probably never, planned. They arise from the innate vulgarity and ignorance or (usually) pretentiousness of their progenitors.

Of course few works are entirely middlebrow; equally, some works are merely tainted with middlebrowism in one or another aspect. Some of the characteristics of the kind of middlebrow literature with which I have been concerned here (where this has not been taken seriously by critics regarded as serious I have happily ignored it), though they never co-exist, are: 'uncanniness', 'weirdness', 'occultness'; 'profundity' in the sense that dictionaries of 'great ideas that have changed the world' are profound; fashionableness — whether in the matter of being sexy or using 'dirty' language or whatever (the 'sopping cunts' of D.M. Thomas); slickness of technique; pseudo-complexity, conferring upon the reader the sense that he is reading a 'difficult' (and therefore 'worthwhile', 'deep') book; potential for discussion at lounge-, drawing-room-, or pub-level (or in the foyers of theatres); liability to excite certain reviewers; the ability to generate such remarks as 'this has changed my life'.

Boulevard culture is of course a term taken over from the theatre: it is a part of middlebrow culture. Gutter culture is 'category writing', romance, horror, and the like, part of the billions of tons of junk shifted profitably towards oblivion each year. This pulp is poisonous, of course, but it carries its own warning signs. It cannot be called harmless, because it is as mentally toxic as the physical pollutants that ecologically aware people wish to eliminate – it is no 'safer' than nuclear waste, and is indeed its mental equivalent. The increasing volume of this deadly pulp is simply a sign of a declining culture; what characterizes it is lack of real energy. Middlebrow literature (which is not of course real literature) has, alas, no more energy than its only supposedly inferior relative. It does pretend to more – and in that sense it is worse. Boulevard culture leads its victims to suppose that they have been taking thought when they have not: they have, as William James once said, simply been rearranging their prejudices. And yet in certain senses it is actually easier to take thought than to pretend to do so. Although I have stated it once, it cannot be too often repeated that literature is nothing if it does not belong to the intelligent and informed general reader. But this reader possesses a modesty which the writer not only does not but perhaps cannot afford to possess. Such modesty makes her or him vulnerable: to the claims of certain (but not all) academic critics, 'the owners of literature', on the one hand (I have already discussed this); and to the delights of middlebrow profundity on the other. Those delights are insidious and corrupting; readers need therefore to be on the lookout. Fortunately the majority – as I know from the letters I receive – are.



The useful term objective correlative was first used by the American painter Washington Allston in 1850; T.S. Eliot revived it in 1919. It has been much criticized as putting either too much or too little emphasis on the objectivity of works of literature. . . . I am not concerned with this; here I mean by it simply: objective equation for personal emotion. If the writer, in expressing a personal emotion about having killed his wife, composes a work about a toad eating dry, red eggs, then that situation is the objective correlative for his emotion at killing his wife. I imply absolutely nothing more by my use of the term: it is purely descriptive. It implies an acceptance of the Freudian formulation of the notion of sublimation, already thoroughly explored by Nietzsche (q.v.), but that is all.



Gnosticism was a 'heresy' which arose at about the time of Jesus Christ. Each record of gnosticism is different, but each one has something in common with the others. Without trying to go deeply into a notoriously difficult subject, all gnosticisms involve the acceptance of the co-existence of good and evil. Death may be overcome only by superior knowledge. Whether gnosticism arose as a result of Christianity, or whether it preceded it – as a form of Greek astralism – is simply not known. But certainly all gnosticisms partake of elements of Greek magic.

The gnosticisms (as they should be called) are mysterious. This is largely because they consist of pessimistic irrational intuitions re-cast in more or less rational form. This was the last desperate fling of sceptical magicians against the certainties being put about (God is good and is watching you personally), to cure the age of its terrible uncertainties, by priests. Augustine, first a gnostic (a Manichean), struggled with noble hysterical zeal to

conquer these tendencies in himself. He ended by being sure about a good God, but unsure about how to explain him – he preached predestination simultaneously with free will (the ideas are compatible, but don't seem to be so). But gnosticism persisted in spite of or perhaps partly because of Augustine. Whenever it seemed to have been put down, up rose its ugly head elsewhere. Its followers were not always intellectual. But it was. It went against the stream; people died only in order to demonstrate their belief that salvation depended on a total rejection of the material world, of creation itself (an accident by which good became imprisoned in the evil of substance).

More recently, in a secular world, gnosticism has arisen again, not only in the form of the popular philosophy known as existentialism (as Hans Jonas, one of the most distinguished writers on gnosticism, has shown) but also as hatred of the world, as nihilism. It lies at the heart of modern nihilism. The nihilism of modernism was the 'heresy' of the old, traditional realism. Critics such as F.L. Lucas – and today, Graham Hough – were desperate to rid good solid old-fashioned realism of this 'unhealthy' heresy; they were convinced that the rot began with an Eliot who was over-influenced by Pound (qq.v.) – they were profoundly ignorant of modernism and its roots. Augustine's feelings about human depravity – he almost enjoyed it, and, though a most radiant man, gloated upon it – are as gnostic as is the naturalism and sense of cultural decay upon which Eliot gloomily dances in *The Waste Land*. The parallels between our own eschatological age and the similar one which saw the invention of Christianity are too important to be missed, although I have not been able to give more than a hint of them throughout the course of this book. They offer food for thought – not the least on the subject of how mankind can do, if it can, without religion.



Madness has always been closely related to literature, if only because not a few writers (such as myself) have been quite widely regarded as being mad. But writers are not more subject to madness than any other section of the community. They are usually sensitive; but then so are many other people (for example, readers). They are simply more prone to hysteria. The phenomenon of so-called 'split personality' has nothing whatever to do with schizophrenia; it is a rare manifestation of hysteria. Hysteria is more wilful than people are led to believe. Writers are wilful people. Hysteria is inevitably 'cured' when no attention is paid to it. But if attention is paid to it (and writers like attention, whatever they may pretend), and it usually and foolishly is, then it can mimic all sorts of illnesses, including what – like the gnosticisms – ought to be called the schizophrenias. The success of R.D. Laing is entirely owed to this. Laing has pretended that because the world is mad therefore 'insane' people are sane. That is ruthless nonsense: it in no way follows, and it happens to be quite untrue. He maintains that mad people, whom he calls schizophrenics (most of his selected schizophrenics were clearly hysterics), are creative. His view of insanity and its function has been very widely influential, especially on writers *manqué*; what I say about it in this book runs counter to what Laing has asserted – so I should explain myself, and explain one or two more fundamental assumptions I have taken.

The world is indeed mad. But its madness does not resemble the madness which cruelly afflicts individuals. The world, as the misunderstood Italian sociologist Pareto saw, is an irrational place pretending to be rational. The world cannot be described as suffering from schizophrenia or affective illness. But people are afflicted either by certain forms of affective disorder (mania, hypomania, depression, various combinations of these

states, blended in with such afflictions as anxiety, panic, fear, disappointment reactions and the like), which was once called 'manic-depressive psychosis', or by one or other of the almost infinite number of the schizophrenias. To make things more difficult, there is also (or is now) a third kind of illness, called schizo-affective – but schizo-affectives are not true schizophrenics. The Americans tended, until the advent of lithium therapy (which alleviates affective illness but is not useful – despite claims – in schizophrenia), to classify people as schizophrenic who were in fact either suffering from affective illness or from hysteria, or who were possibly just exhausted. It has been said, for example, that Berryman and Lowell (qq.v.) suffered from affective disorders as well as alcoholism and other illnesses. Lowell may have been a genuine manic-depressive in the old-fashioned sense (although the use of meprobromate, named in his poetry – as *Miltown* – would be singularly useless except as a feeble tranquillizer or, more likely, to worsen the effects of alcohol); but what both he and his friend suffered from, mainly, were gross hysteria and hyperbolic self-love. There is no reason to withhold sympathy from either on that account – many of us are or have been in the same case – but it is as well to have the facts straight. The vast majority of American psychiatrists are very awful (as each of them will confirm), and few understood that hallucinations and paranoid ideation could occur in people who were suffering from depression, and from states in which mania and depression were mixed, as well as from schizophrenia (in which they are admittedly more often seen). As readers of this book will learn, many writers from the earlier period were similarly misdiagnosed: Campana (q.v.), for example.

Before the advent of anti-psychotic drugs – rauwolfia was the first, but it had grave disadvantages; really the first effective one was chlorpromazine (*largactil*), available from the early Fifties – the prognosis for schizophrenia was grim, that for 'manic-depressive psychosis' good. True, you could have one attack of schizophrenia and recover; but you were more likely to get worse. In this terrible illness the personality withdraws into panic and atrocious fear, and finally disintegrates. I do not think that it is in any way a creative illness. I think it is anti-creative. What schizophrenic patients create is child-like and bizarre. The 'word-salads' produced by schizophrenics are documents produced in the most pathetic (and terrifying) fear. The personality withdraws into itself and almost disappears. Not too many writers have been schizophrenics unless their illness has silenced them. In the affective illnesses and in that form of paranoia which is not schizophrenic the personality remains intact, despite temporary lapses into incoherence. The sufferer from mania and depression, and especially perhaps the sufferer from that agonizing form of illness in which the two are combined, is not creatively affected: his creative insights are even enhanced, although at (*pace* Laing, who in any case has never shown any interest in that type of illness – he just likes sick and destructive people, whom he can then call sane by definition) a terrible price.

The nature of schizophrenia, like that of paranoia, is not understood at all (affective illness is very slightly better understood), and no doubt literary insights – particularly in some modern Hebrew fiction – are valuable. There are priceless accounts of schizophrenic collapse in all literatures. But the Laingian idea – an idea I believe to be so misguided as to be positively wicked – that schizophrenia is in some way a positive or 'creative' process is utterly wrong. On the contrary, schizophrenia is a much worse enemy of life, and of the creation of that energy that makes life still worth living, than is, say, cancer – which can produce creative courage and dignity. That a man who has had the opportunity to view patients suffering from schizophrenia should come up with such a notion is extraordinary; and very unkind. That literature which has been modelled on his ideas is junk, worthy only to be shifted, along with the tons of bilge produced every year, through profit to oblivion. It is an insult to the human spirit, and a cruel lie.



For a truly viable (non-commercial) theatre to exist there has to be a truly viable audience. This certainly exists — or existed until a few years ago — in Belgium. The theatre of today is largely in the hands of the directors (hence the term, used pejoratively by me, director's theatre), who do not work in true conjunction with the authors of plays, but rather as more or less commercial entrepreneurs, 'commercial realists' who manipulate such dramatic texts as they decide to exploit to meet the needs of their (alas, mostly middlebrow) audiences. The genuine dramatist has to survive this and to assert himself. All he has on his side is the spirit of the genuine theatre — but this, fortunately, survives along with (and often in the purveyors of) the commercial theatre. There are two tests of a genuine dramatist: his work must be playable on the stage, in some form, at any time during or after his lifetime; and it must stand the test of reading as well as viewing. Perhaps there are a score of twentieth-century dramatists who will fulfil these requirements. I have discussed these and a number of other interesting ones. But it must be remembered that this is a guide to literature and not to the entertainment industry or the history of socio-anthropological phenomena, however intelligently motivated.



Another concept that I have used freely is what I have christened *Künstlerschuld*: 'artist-guilt'. Increasingly in this century poets and writers (Rilke, Mann and Broch are examples) have been beset by the fear that literature fulfils no useful, but only a selfish function. The writers who feel this particular kind of anguish have been or are almost invariably dedicated to literature to the exclusion of everything else (Broch is an exception). The question is, of course, as old as Plato (this was how Aristotle and others understood Plato); but for some writers of the past hundred or so years it has become crucial. Broch tried not to be a writer. At one point Rilke wanted to be a country doctor. Joyce was famously guilty about 'using' his family. Laura Riding 'repudiated' poetry. Mann portrayed the writer as a sick Faustus...

This is of course a relevant theme in an age of 'committed literature' and socialist realism (this is discussed fully in the section devoted to Russian literature; it must, of course, be distinguished from mere social realism, which means no more than it implies). The naïve writer has no doubts: Neruda, the most substantial of those modern poets who lacked a sense of intellectual responsibility, had no difficulty in reconciling his poetry with what he called communism. But it was not really communism. This phenomenon, of *Künstlerschuld*, has never been picked up by critics, perhaps because they would like to be creative writers and think that the life is all delight and ease. But if a hatred or at least a powerful suspicion of what you are is built into your enterprises, as is the case, then this is clearly paradoxical and interesting.



It is towards the truly mysterious — and yet authentic — that the creative writer must now aim. This is why much of the newest poetry and fiction is coming from Latin America: an

exotic and largely unexplored region of the world that well matches our own even more exotic, even less explored regions. Recourse to the purely surreal can now lead to nothing better than the raw material of the dream – which, as it comes into consciousness, is censored, screened. What is needed – we have had it in Rilke, Vallejo and some others – is the real dream: the meaning of the dream in terms of its own original, unknown, mysterious, day-haunting images – not in those of (say) a psycho-analytical interpretation. This truth contains, absorbs and accepts death.

The problem is one of control as well as of inspiration: what kind of control must the writer exercise over his immediate impulses to return to this naïve realm? Here the animal cunning of sentimentive writers such as Vallejo or Rilke can be useful. One thinks in this connection of the cunning art of the ‘primitive’ man who hunts, for food, animals he loves: this is nearer to the required sentimentive than is the cleverness of the regular academic critic – for all the ancient wisdom that is locked up, one might say fossilized, inside the notions with which he so fascinatingly plays.

Blandford Forum  
23 June 1984

Martin Seymour-Smith

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# Abbreviations

- AD: *Absurd Drama*, P. Meyer, 1965  
abd.: abridged  
ad: adapted  
add.: with additional matter  
AGD: *Avant-Garde Drama*, 13.F. Dukore and D.C. Gerould, 1969  
AL: *Albanian Literature*, S.E. Mann, 1955  
AMEP: *Anthology of Modern Estonian Poetry*, W.K. Matthews, 1955  
AMHP: *Anthology of Modern Hebrew Poetry*, A. Birman, 1968  
AMYP: *Anthology of Modern Yugoslav Poetry*, J. Lavrin, 1963  
ANZP: *Anthology of New Zealand Poetry*, V. O'Sullivan, 1970  
AP: *Africa in Prose*, O.R. Dathorne and W. Feuser, 1969  
ARL: *Anthology of Russian Literature in the Soviet Period*, B.G. Guernsey, 1960  
ASP: Apollinaire: *Selected Poems*, O. Bernard, 1965  
AU: *Agenda*, vol. 8, no. 2, Ungaretti Special Issue, Spring 1970  
AW: *Australian Writing Today*, C. Higham, 1968  
AWT: *African Writing Today*, E. Mphahlele, 1967  
BAP: Bella Akmadulina: *Fever and Other Poems*, G. Dutton and I. Mezhakov-Koriakin, 1970  
BAV: *Book of Australian Verse*, J. Wright, 1956  
BEJD: Josef Brodsky: *Elegy for John Donne and Other Poems*, N. Bethell, 1967  
BISS: *Penguin Book of Italian Short Stories*, G. Waldman, 1969  
BP: Bertolt Brecht: *Plays*, 2 vols, J. Willett and E. Bentley, 1960-62  
BRV: *Book of Russian Verse*, C.M. Bowra, 1943  
BRV2: *Second Book of Russian Verse*, C.M. Bowra, 1948  
BSP: André Breton: *Selected Poems*, K. White, 1969  
CCD: *Chief Contemporary Dramatists*, 3 vols, T.H. Dickinson, 1915-30  
CDP: *Contemporary Danish Plays*, E. Bredsdorff, 1955  
CFP: *Contemporary French Poetry*, A. Aspel and D. Justice, 1965  
CGP: *Contemporary German Poetry*, J. Bithell, 1909  
CGPD: *Contemporary German Poetry*, B. Deutsch and A. Yarinolinsky, 1923  
CIP: *Contemporary Italian Poetry*, C.L. Golino, 1962  
CIV: *Contemporary Italian Verse*, G. Singh, 1968  
CLP: *Century of Latvian Poetry*, W.K. Matthews, 1957  
CP: Anton Chekhov, *Plays*, 1959  
CRP: *Anthology of Contemporary Rumanian Poetry*, R. MacGregor-Hastie, 1969  
CTP: Albert Camus: *Caligula and Three Other Plays*, S. Gilbert, 1958  
CV: *Caribbean Verse*, O.R. Dathorne, 1967  
CWT: *Canadian Writing Today*, M. Richler, 1970  
DFP: Friedrich Dürrenmatt: *Four Plays*, G. Nellhaus et al, 1964  
ed.: edited by

- EOWYO: *Envy and Other Works of Yuri Olesha*, A. MacAndrew, 1963  
 ESW: Paul Eluard: *Selected Writings*, L. Alexander, 1951  
 FBS: Marcel Raymond: *From Baudelaire to Surrealism*, 1950  
 FCP: *Five Centuries of Polish Poetry*, J. Peterkiewicz, Burns Singer and J. Stallworthy, 1970  
 FGP: *Four Greek Poets*, E. Keeley and P. Sherrard, 1966  
 FMR: *From the Modern Repertoire*, 3 vols, E. Bentley, 1949-56  
 Fr.: French  
 FSP: *Four Soviet Plays*, B. Blake, 1937  
 FTP: Max Frisch: *Three Plays*, M. Bullock, 1962  
 FTS: Frank Wedekind: *Five Tragedies of Sex*, B. Fawcett and S. Spender, 1952  
 FWT: *French Writing Today*, S.W. Taylor, 1968  
 GED: *Anthology of German Expressionist Drama*, W.H. Sokel, 1963  
 Ger.: German  
 GMS: *Plays of Gregorio Martinez Sierra*, H. Granville-Barker and J.G. Underhill, 1923  
 GSP: Michel de Ghelderode: *Seven Plays*, G. Hauger and G. Hopkins, 1960  
 GSS: *German Short Stories*, R. Newnham, 1964  
 GWT: *German Writing Today*, C. Middleton, 1967  
 HE: *Heart of Europe*, T. Mann and H. Kesten, 1943  
 HSS: *Hungarian Short Stories*, 1967  
 HW: René Char: *Hypnos Waking*, J. Matthews, 1956  
 HWL: Joseph Reményi, *Hungarian Writers as Literature*, 1964  
 IMPL: *Introduction to Modern Polish Literature*, A. Gillon and L. Krzyzanowski, 1964  
 IMSL: *Introduction to Modern Spanish Literature*, K. Schwartz, 1968  
 IN: P.J. Jouve: *An Idiom of Night*, K. Bosley, 1968  
 IP4: Eugene Ionesco: *4 Plays*, D. Watson, 1958  
 IQ: *Italian Quartet*, R. Fulton, 1966  
 ISS: *Italian Short Stories*, R. Trevelyan, 1965  
 IWT: *Italian Writing Today*, R. Trevelyan, 1967  
 JDP: Max Jacob: *Drawings and Poems*, S.J. Collier, 1951  
 JLME: Y. Okazakix: *Japanese Literature in the Meiji Era*, V.H. Vigliemo, 1955  
 LAP: *Anthology of Latin-American Poetry*, D. Fitts, 1942  
 LTT: Federico García Lorca: *Three Tragedies*, J. Graham-Luján and R.L. O'Connell, 1961  
 LWLF: *An Anthology of Byelorussian Poetry from 1928 until the Present Day*, 1971  
 LWT: *Latin-American Writing Today*, J.M. Cohen, 1967  
 MAP: *Modern African Prose*, R. Rive, 1964  
 MBL: *Introduction to Modern Bulgarian Literature*, N. Kirilov and F. Kirk, 1969  
 MBSP: V. Mayakovsky: *The Bedbug and Selected Poetry*, P. Blake, 1961  
 MEP: *Modern European Poetry*, W. Barnstone, 1966  
 MFC: *Four Modern French Comedies*, A. Bermel, 1960  
 MGL: *Introduction to Modern Greek Literature*, M.P. Gianos, 1969  
 MGP: *Modern German Poetry*, M. Hamburger and C. Middleton, 1962  
 MHP: *Mayakovsky and his Poetry*, H. Marshall, 1965  
 MJL: *Modern Japanese Literature*, D. Keene, 1956  
 MJS: *Modern Japanese Stories*, I. Morris, 1961  
 MPA: *Modern Poetry from Africa*, G. Moore and U. Beier, 1963  
 MRD: *Masterpieces of Russian Drama*, 1933  
 MRP: *Modern Russian Poetry*, V. Markov and M. Sparks, 1966  
 MRPC: *Modern Rumanian Poetry*, N. Catanoy, 1967  
 MSP: Oscar Venceslas de Lubicz Milosz: *14 Poems*, K. Rexroth, 1952  
 MST: *Modern Spanish Theatre*, M. Benedikt and G.E. Wellwarth, 1968

- MSW: Henri Michaux: *Selected Writings*, R. Ellmann, 1968  
 MT: *Modern Theatre*, 6 vols, E. Bentley, 1955-60  
 NIP: *The New Italian Poetry*, L. Smith, 1981  
 NTE: *The New Theatre in Europe*, R.W. Lorrigan, 1962  
 NVSP: *Selected Poems of Neruda and Vallejo*, R. Bly, 1970  
 NWC: *New Writing in Czechoslovakia*, G. Theiner, 1969  
 NWP: *New Writing from the Philippines*, L. Caspar, 1966  
 NWS: *The New Wave Spanish Drama*, G.E. Wellwarth, 1970  
 NWY: *New Writing in Yugoslavia*, B. Johnson, 1970  
 OBCV: *The Oxford Book of Canadian Verse*, A.J.M. Smith, 1960  
 orig: originally  
 OW: *Ocean at the Window*, A. Tezla, 1980  
 PAWT: *African Writing Today*, E. Mphahlele, 1967  
 PBFV3, PBFV4: *Penguin Book of French Verse 3, 4*, A. Hartley, 1957, 1959  
 PBGV: *Penguin Book of Greek Verse*, C. Trypanis, 1971  
 PC: Anton Chekhov: *Plays*, E. Fen, 1959  
 PGV: *Penguin Book of German Verse*, L. Forster, 1957  
 PI: *Poem Itself*, S. Burnshaw, 1960  
 PIV: *Penguin Book of Italian Verse*, G. Kay, 1965  
 PJV: *Penguin Book of Japanese Verse*, G. Bownas and A. Thwaite, 1964  
 PKM: Kai Munk: *Five Plays*, R.P. Keigwin, 1953  
 PLAV: *Penguin Book of Latin-American Verse*, E. Caracciolo-Trejo, 1971  
 PLJ: *Poetry of Living Japan*, D.J. Enright and T. Ninomiya, 1957  
 POM: *The Prose of Osip Mandelstam*, C. Brown, 1965  
 PNT: *Plays for a New Theatre*, A.S. Weineger and C.J. Atkinson, 1966  
 PP: Alfred French: *The Poets of Prague*, 1969  
 PPPP: *Post-War Polish Poetry*, C. Milosz, 1965  
 PRP: Robert Pinget: *Plays*, 2 vols, S. Beckett, B. Bray, 1965-7  
 PRV: *Penguin Book of Russian Verse*, D. Obolensky, 1965  
 ps.: pseudonym of  
 PSAV: *Penguin Book of South-African Verse*, J. Cope and U. Krige, 1968  
 PSV: *Penguin Book of Spanish Verse*, J.M. Cohen, 1956  
 pt.: part  
 PTP: Luigi Pirandello: *Three Plays*, A. Livingstone, 1923  
 PWT: *Polish Writing Today*, C. Wieniewska, 1967  
 rev.: revised  
 RP: *Russian Poetry 1917-55*, J. Lindsay, 1956  
 RSP: Pierre Reverdy: *Poems*, A. Greet, 1968  
 SAWT: *South-African Writing Today*, N. Gordimer and L. Abraham, 1967  
 SCO: *Swan, Cygnets and owl*, M.E. Johnson, 1956  
 sel.: selected by  
 SL: *Soviet Literature, an Anthology*, G. Reavey and M. Slonim, 1933  
 SP: Bert Brecht: *Seven Plays*, E. Bentley, 1961  
 SSP: *Six Soviet Plays*, E. Lyons, 1934  
 SSW: Jules Supervielle: *Selected Writings*, 1967  
 TC: Anton Chekhov: *The Tales*, 13 vols, C. Garnett, 1916-22  
 TCG: *Penguin Book of Twentieth Century German Verse*, P. Bridgwater, 1963  
 TCGV: *Twentieth Century German Verse*, H. Salinger, 1952  
 TCSP: *20th Century Scandinavian Poetry*, M.S. Allwood, 1950  
 TGBP: *Two Great Belgian Plays about Love*, 1966

- TMCP: *Three Modern Czech Poets*, E. Osers and G. Theiner, 1971  
TMP: *Twenty-five Modern Plays*, S.F. Tucker, 1931  
TNM: *Two Novels of Mexico*, L.B. Simpson, 1964  
TPAVL: *Three Plays of A. V. Lunacherski*, 1923  
tr.: translated by  
TSP: *Three Soviet Plays*, M. Glenny, 1966  
TT: *Tellers of Tales*, W.S. Maugham, 1939  
UP: *Ukrainian Poets*, W. Kirkconnell and C.H. Andrusyshen, 1963  
VA: Andrey Voznesensky: *Antiworlds*, P. Blake and M. Hayward, 1967  
VCW: Paul Valéry: *Collected Works*, J. Matthews, 1962  
VSW: Paul Valéry: *Selected Writings*, 1950  
VIT: Paul Éluard: *Thorns of Thunder*, G. Reavey, S. Beckett, 1936  
WNC: *Writers in the New Cuba*, J.M. Cohen, 1967  
ZS: Nikolay Zabolotsky: *Scrolls*, D. Weissbert, 1970

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# African and Caribbean Literature

## I

The emergence of a people, oppressed for centuries, into articulate awareness of their insulted and traumatic history is a matter of concern to everyone. But the matter is a highly complex one, as one learns most easily of all, perhaps, from V.S. Naipaul's (q.v.) essays *The Overcrowded Barracoon* (1972), in which he shows how not only the foundation of the British Empire but also its dissolution caused untold suffering. One can extend his humane concern and explanations to other empires and other places than those he deals with. The literature of Black Africa is, of course, only one aspect of this confused but increasingly evident emergence. But its intrinsic literary importance has sometimes – with every justification – been somewhat exaggerated. Such works (I take a random example) as the Ethiopian Sahle Sellasie's (1936) *Shinega's Village: Scenes of Ethiopian Life* (1964; tr. 1970), the first work written in Chaha – a hitherto unwritten Ethiopian dialect which Sellasie used an Arabic script to transcribe – are important in sociological and historical terms. So is his *The Afersata* (1969), written in English, describing how a remote Ethiopian community with no police force investigates an outbreak of arson by its age-old 'Afersata' method. But neither is a work of great literary importance. Even the more famous African writers, such as Senghor (q.v.), have had exaggerated claims made for them. These writers will be important figures in the history of the literature now emerging; but the intrinsic importance of their work – as literature – will surely be seen to be smaller than is now apparent. I mean that no indisputably major poets or novelists, with the possible or probable exceptions of those I have chosen – out of a hundred or so – to discuss here, have yet emerged. I have quoted the South African writer Ezekiel Mphahlele's (q.v.) reasons for his holding of a similar view in the section dealing with black South African writing, which should be read in conjunction with this.

The tensions in black literature are acute. What black man, who is also a writer, is to assert that it is more important for him to function independently – as a writer must (but witness the fierce bitterness attracted by V.S. Naipaul for choosing to be non-political) – when he and his fellows' freedom seems to be threatened and insulted? Good writing has arisen from such tensions; interesting writing has arisen from them; as yet not a large number of unquestioned masterpieces have. But what is happening and is likely to happen in this area is important, for literature is here being put to the test. It is being put to the test as much in 'liberated' Cuba as it is in the more unequivocally oppressed Haiti.

Yet two strands are already clearly discernible in the black literature of the world: one is 'committed' to negritude (q.v.), or something akin to it or developed from it (at the most extreme, 'black power'); the other is for obvious reasons less easily definable, but it leaves writers freer and more open to attack from their colleagues. Its spokesmen (the

South African Ezekiel Mphahlele is one of them) are often accused, by adherents of negritude, of such crimes as 'colonialism, neo-colonialism and imperialism'. But this is an attack by political upon literary animals; it also represents a misunderstanding of the nature of literature. It may be that, in the wider context, the activists are correct; it may be that they are wrong. In the context of literature they are missing the point. Literature is made not with ideas but with imagination; and despite the arguments of committed writers, the imagination is autonomous (I do not apologize for repeating this so often), and owes no allegiance to any form of dogma, even if certain assumptions are built into it. Writers in favour of Marxist commitment call this view 'mystical'. But it is not mystical; it merely acknowledges a mystery. It is a mystery exceedingly hard even to begin to solve; only some knowledge of anthropology – and not a fashionable one at that – can help.

However, this is the situation at present. But such writers as Mphahlele and Soyinka (q.v.) – who has pointed out that tigers do not need to advertise their tigrity – readily acknowledge that negritude was a 'necessary phase'; if one did not like the word 'necessary' one could substitute 'inevitable'.

Although the concept of negritude was fully developed in Paris during the Thirties by such poets as Senghor (q.v.), it originated in the Caribbean and elsewhere: it is not in fact a French phenomenon, even if the single issue of the magazine *Légitime Défense* (June 1932) launched the actual movement (the editors, young French West Indians such as Étienne Lérou, did not become well known). In the French islands the Africans were as violently alienated from their original nature as any black men anywhere: displaced, separated from their immediate families, forced into the Roman Catholicism of their masters, they either developed secret systems such as Voodoo (in Haiti) – a distorted means of asserting their essential Africanity – or they tried to become, by imitation, the very thing that oppressed them. The French were always glad to bestow upon a 'good', Catholic, educated, 'civilized' black the ultimate honour: to be a 'black Frenchman' ('*évolué*'). But this system of 'assimilation', until recently practised by the Portuguese ('*assimilado*'), does not allow for French (or Portuguese) black men. . . . Nor was it ever sincere: it was just a patronizing reward-system: a false payment to a man for selling his soul and his self. Thus, the 'good' black slaves of the French were told of their 'Gallic' ancestry. Assimilation is based on the anthropologically erroneous assumption (convenient to master-races engaged in economic exploitation, and therefore primarily a Victorian notion) that the concept of evolution can be applied to the 'progress' of human species. The insult contained in such an attitude – 'you are a primitive non-European, a version of my unperfected self – is both loveless and humanly wounding. Only now are we beginning to realize that so-called 'primitive' societies are too complex for 'civilized' people to understand with either ease or confidence. Some (myself included) prefer some of them, though this attitude is not at all easy to maintain – societies differ in so many ways – and it is best described as emotional and subjective.

Negritude expressed itself mainly, but not entirely, in poetry. Ironically it got its first chance in Cuba – as *negrismo* – when there was a European craze for all things African. (This craze did not represent a sudden awareness of the riches of African culture, but a reaction to the First World War.) In Haiti there was a similar revival. Caribbean Africans, thus encouraged, began to look at their true heritage. There were magazines – in Cuba *Revista de Avance* (1927–30) and in Haiti *La Revue Indigène*. Then, in Paris, a group of students, including Césaire (q.v.) and Senghor, published one issue of a magazine called *The Black Student*; later Volontés printed Césaire's *Return to My Native Land* (1939; tr. 1947 as *Memorandum on My Martinique* – the best translation; tr. not recommended for its English, 1979). This was ignored at the time; but André Breton (q.v.) found a roneoed copy of it in 1940, visited Césaire in Martinique in 1942, and publicized the poem when

he returned to France. When it was republished in 1956 it was already famous both as a surrealist poem and as the quintessential expression of negritude.

However, it must be added that a great deal of nonsense has been written about negritude – and that, although the term has had a concrete meaning to some writers, it is in fact an abstraction. Even Senghor has written very foolishly on the subject, as when he stated that the African was ‘non-intellectual’ – for which remark a Ghanaian critic called him an ‘apologist of France speaking to Africa!’ Yet on another occasion he said, ‘Claude McKay [q.v.] can rightfully be considered the spiritual father of negritude.’ Apart from tracing the history of the movement – which was of course to alienate many writers later on – the only useful definition of negritude is that it represented a conscious effort to reach back to traditional roots, whether it was thus defined or not. Obviously the integration of the ‘traditional’ (an anthropological concept of the utmost difficulty) into Westernized countries was going to present enormous problems and produce violent arguments. L. Hughes (q.v.) and McKay are as important in the development of negritude as Senghor or Césaire. ...

**Aimé Césaire** (1913) was born in the kind of circumstances suffered by most poor African peasants in Martinique. His house was ‘a shack splitting open with blisters like a peach-tree tormented by blight, and the roof worn thin, mended with bits of petrol cans, this roof pisses swamps of rust on to the grey sordid stinking mass of straw. ...’ His own status turns out, in fact, not to have been as bad as this (the Césaires were almost an elite within their own society); but the exaggeration is excusable. Césaire was a communist, but left the party in 1956. Now he is a deputy to the French Assembly, representing the independent revolutionary party of Martinique (which has an association with France – it was he who gained its transfer from colony to overseas department in 1946). *Return to My Native Land* is his main work, though he has written much else. Its style has been profoundly influenced by surrealism (q.v.) – the logical weapon with which to assail the polite and dreamless language of the oppressor – but it is misleading to call it a surrealist poem: its structure, and much of its content, is too immediately comprehensible to the rational, conscious mind. But it is disorganized enough – in terms of what ‘poetry-loving’, paternalistic colonials would expect – for its purpose. Césaire’s negritude is here a state of the soul: ‘I want to rediscover the secret of great speech and of great burning ... The man who couldn’t understand me couldn’t understand the roaring of a tiger’; ‘my negritude riddles with holes/the dense affliction of its worthy patience’.

Césaire’s later work, much of which is in dramatic form, is less successful than *Return to My Native Land*. He ceased to write poetry after the late Fifties. The most interesting of his plays are *A Season in the Congo* (*Un Saison au Congo*, 1966; tr. 1969), on Lumumba, and his version of *The Tempest* (*Une Tempête*, 1969), in which Caliban is the black hero and Prospero an inept colonizer. His infuriated *Letter to Maurice Thorez* (1956; tr. 1957) is important on his break with communism. His *Complete Works, Oeuvres complètes*, appeared in 1976 in translation. Césaire’s is not a great mind, and he has borrowed much from others. But he is a generous man, and possesses true originality – even if this be less than the majority of his critics like to suppose.

**Léopold Sédar Senghor** (1906), until recently First President of Senegal, is often thought of as the leading apostle of negritude; but in fact his version of it now differs from his friend Césaire’s (q.v.). His father was wealthy (Senghor remembers his being visited by a king); he has retained his Catholicism; and where Césaire is in many ways well to the left of organized communism, Senghor is a passionate pan-Africanist (his own experiments in federation failed) whose sympathy with Marxism is tempered by his conviction that it is an unsuitable system for under-developed peoples, and by his Roman Catholicism. In Césaire’s negritude there is at least an element of what is now known as ‘black

power': the militant movement that advocates seizure of power, by black people, from a white society which they see as rapidly falling into a decay induced by capitalism. This comes out strongly and convincingly in *Une Saison au Congo* (q.v.), in which Lumumba is seen as a redemptive figure: 'I speak and I give Africa back to herself'. Senghor, on the contrary, is an integrationist, who has in more recent years been influenced, and not at all fruitfully, by the Jesuit Teilhard de Chardin's ideas of 'cosmic complexification': a number of organisms fitting symbiotically together to form a united whole. He would thus see the Black African states united in a federation, and, in a wider context, this federation as a part in a still larger federation. His own political record is more humanly honourable than most; for example, his erstwhile associate Mamadou Dia, tried in 1962 – after a crisis the details of which are not fully known – was imprisoned and eventually released, instead of being executed. ... 'Negritude', Senghor has written, 'is the *sum total of the values of the African world* ... intuitive reason, reason which is embrace and not reason which is eye ... the *communal warmth, the image-symbol and the cosmic rhythm which instead of dividing and sterilizing, unified and made fertile*'. Other aspects of his negritude include: rhythm (incantation); style – of sympathy; humour ('laughter to keep from crying' – as the American Negro Langston Hughes put it); the haunting presence of the dead. ... It was poetry reflecting this complex attitude – embracing non-whiteness as well as blackness – that Senghor included in his important *Anthology of New Negro and Malagasy Poetry*, introduced by Sartre (q.v.), in 1948. On the whole Sartre managed, in his introduction, to discuss the 'racist' and other difficult implications of negritude with good sense.

Senghor's poetry has appeared in several volumes, of which the first was *Songs in Shadow* (*Chants d'ombre*, 1945). There is a good English selection: *Prose and Poetry* (1964). Senghor's presentation is in the tradition of Claudel (q.v.): free verse in 'versets'. He also resembles Claudel in his use of elemental imagery and copious rhetoric. In the poem 'Chaka', however, he significantly fails to reconcile his poethood with his role as politician. It is unlikely that much of his poetry, however, will survive: it is very self-conscious, and in fact more 'intellectual' than it looks (whatever he says about 'the African' being 'non-intellectual'); it is also not without a certain rhetorical pomposity. W.E. Abraham's verdict that his verse is 'French ... interlarded with African allusions' is a fair one. That his poetry transformed negritude into a 'lonely confrontation with the self' is an assertion to be doubted. (AWT; AP)

Léon Damas (1912–78), Senghor's and Césaire's (qq.v.) associate in Paris in the Thirties, came from French Guiana. His mother was a mulatto and confused him greatly by talking about 'niggers' (there is much 'racism' between Blacks of light and dark hue). He made some successful innovations in French versification before Césaire or Senghor. *Pigments* (1937), introduced by Desnos (q.v.), the first volume of 'negritude poetry' to be published, was destroyed by the French police. Damas, once described as 'not a whole person' – because of his early 'Frenchness' – was a minor poet who was at his best when most lighthearted or sarcastic and satirical. He spent the last part of his life in America, and died in Washington. *Black-Label* (1956) was a confused collection, in which he denounces what he believes in: 'Africanism'. Birago Diop (1906), a Senegalese veterinary surgeon who became an ambassador, but then returned to care for animals, is usually classed as a poet of negritude; he is most distinguished, however, as a short-story writer. He was influenced by Maran (q.v.). Both his poetry and his prose incorporate Senegalese folklore in a subtle and sophisticated, and yet apparently artless, manner. He is one of Africa's most accomplished and elegant prose stylists. Birago Diop is a superior writer to Senghor (q.v.): his Africanism is much more thorough and natural, and he is never grandiose. He demonstrates the fate of those at odds with society in its 'natural' state.

The stories may be read in *Tales of Amadou Koumba* (tr. 1966), selected from three volumes written in French published in 1947, 1958 and 1963 respectively. Amadou is the *griot* (the oral storyteller), and 'his' tales are rooted in Wolof tradition; Diop renders these folktales of animals with impeccable art – and has acknowledged the genius of Amadou himself, a real person, a *griot* well known to him. His poetry is genuinely charming, but not profound as are the tales. (MPA) **David Diop** (1927–60), of mixed Senegalese-Cameroonian blood, born in France – he only visited Africa – published one book, *Coups de Pilon* (1956); all his manuscripts were lost when he died in an air crash. In Diop's poetry we see an aggressive affirmation of negritude, immature but of great power. He was aware that he did not understand his 'own Africa', and consequently drew more from Césaire (q.v.) than from other poets. Yet for a young poet he made much of his peculiar predicament. (AWT; MPA)

The Malagasy, **Jean-Joseph Rabéarivelo** (1901–37), included by Senghor (q.v.) in his 1948 anthology, was a victim of 'assimilation': the persistent refusal of French clerks to allow him to go to France, whose culture he loved, caused him first to take to drugs and then to kill himself. He may reasonably be regarded both as murdered by the stupidity of bureaucrats, and as an example of what 'assimilation' meant in practice. He is rightly regarded as the founder of modern Malagasy literature in French. He just had time to perfect his style. From self-consciously symbolist poetry in faulty French he graduated to masterly adaptations of Malagasy vernacular poetry:

What invisible rat  
come from the walls of night  
gnaws at the milky cake of the moon?  
Tomorrow morning,  
when it has gone,  
there will be bleeding marks of teeth. . . .

And all will snigger  
and, staggering, will fall.  
The moon will no longer be there:  
the rat will have carried her into his hole.

(MPA)

He also wrote poetry in Spanish. In truth Rabéarivelo was not a poet of negritude at all. He was good enough to transcend categories. He was a melancholic, and his poetry is a description of the condition of melancholy, a rare sense of the beautiful and strange. He speaks of himself as having sheltered under 'apathy', of dreading eternity. *24 Poems* (tr. 1962) is a helpful guide to his unusual power. He drew much inspiration from *hain-teny*, the traditional love poetry in the Malagasy language, a member of the Malayo-Polynesian group.

**Jean-Jacques Rabemamananjara** (1913) was luckier than his countryman Rabéarivelo (q.v.), whose disciple he early proclaimed himself: as a civil servant in Madagascar he managed to get to France on a tour of duty, and the Second World War prevented his return. He began by imitating French models; then he followed Rabéarivelo in his adaptations of popular indigenous ballads. His later style, however, imitates that of Senghor and, beyond him, Claudel (qq.v.); but rhetoric usually swamps invention. Rabemamananjara was imprisoned in 1947 for his part in the uprising against the French; but he became a minister in the first independent government (1960). His most original

work is contained in his plays, which include *The Malagasy Gods* (1947). His more recent work, such as *Lamba* (1956), poems, is wholly synthetic.

Flavien Ranaivo (1914), more poetically gifted, has carried on where his compatriot Rabéarivelo (q.v.) left off in the exploration of Malagasy popular poetry, particularly in *hain-teny*. His collection *My Songs of Always* (*Mes chansons de toujours*, 1955) was introduced by Senghor (q.v.). In some poems Ranaivo fails, but he has been most successful in recreating, in French, the love-poetry of his native land, since it is evident that he writes from personal experience. The whole question of the necessity – simply because Malagasy is not and will never be accessible to most of us – of recreation into accessible languages of the secrets of less accessible ones raises innumerable problems, perhaps tragic in their implications. (MPA)

## II

The novel in English in Africa came entirely from the West. There was no such thing as an indigenous novel – only folktales, although the quality of these was certainly never less than that of any novels, just as the quality of ‘Homer’ (whoever ‘he’ may have been) could not be said to be less than that of any narrative which followed it. The Africans already had, of course, both poetry and drama. But the sophistication of the novel they did not have. Realization of this can sometimes induce a feeling that, in one sense, the novel is a bad thing. But it is no more than necessary to acknowledge this feeling, which is anthropological in its nature – and too simplistically cuts out what we now are: have been made to be. Nevertheless, such a teller of tales as Birago Diop (q.v.), who transmits and transforms the spirit of his *griot* so beautifully, and with such respect, must cause us to experience such a sadness: a sadness at the loss of innocence. But then we remember that, if literature is worth anything, then we have had to have the novel, if only to record this loss in its own terms; and that the Africans (and other colonized and exploited peoples) have eventually had to have it too. Its coming into being in Africa and the Caribbean was hard.

It started late in the English language. E. Casely-Hayford’s *Ethiopia Bound* (1911) was a fascinating start, but was not true fiction. More important is R.E. Obeng’s *Eighteenpence* (1943), a real novel – and, curiously enough, published at the author’s own expense at Ilfracombe in England by the first of the English ‘vanity publishers’. *Eighteenpence* is still just readable; but its extrinsic importance is not in question. It is the simple story of a too obviously virtuous man, told in language that derives quite frequently, not from the Bible, but rather from the Bible as it was taught by the missionaries to the ‘ignorant’ Africans. But in parts, and in some (limited) ways as a whole, it transcends its origins. The author himself emerges from his book, and was a true pioneer.

Its successors were some time in coming, although in almost all the African countries locally printed novels – looking very like the pulp fiction produced by supposedly respectable publishers in Great Britain and America today – were highly successful in market terms, and were not always at a pulp level. The first book to be published commercially in a large edition was the Nigerian Yoruba Amos Tutuola’s (1920) *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* [sic] (1952). This achieved an enormous success in English-speaking countries, but was not very popular in Nigeria. One can see both why it was so successful – and why it was so strongly disliked by Nigerians. Tutuola is an uneducated storekeeper, and his command of English is poor. Part of his appeal does indeed lie in the quaintness of his

English – and anyone who has taught Africans, whether by mail or in person, is familiar with this charming and funny quaintness. But a number of Tutuola's British readers were amused in a patronizing manner. Furthermore, he owed a very great deal to another Yoruba writer, one practically unknown outside Nigeria: **Daniel O. Fagunwa** (c 1910–63), who wrote in Yoruba and who died prematurely in a boating accident (he worked for the British publisher Heinemann in the latter part of his life). It is said that in Yoruba Fagunwa is a better writer than Tutuola (q.v.), and I have no doubt that this is true – but how many of us know or ever will know Yoruba? However, Soyinka's (q.v.) *A Hunter's Saga* (1968), from Fagunwa's 1939 novel, which is of course in Yoruba, suggests that Fagunwa is indeed at least as good as Tutuola. Tutuola, who owes much to *The Pilgrim's Progress* in English, is an intellectually simple-minded man (his Christianity is a refuge for his simple-mindedness); but he has a powerful imagination which really is his own, and *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (if not its successors) is a remarkable book: part, as I have said, merely quaint, but part an extraordinary account of a spiritual adventure. That it is not as good as Birago Diop (q.v.) – or others whom we cannot even read – is, in pragmatic terms, beside the point.

In terms of the non-African, non-Negro, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is an epic masterpiece, a mixture of native lore, poetry, children's tall tale, innocently observed modernity and grotesquerie. The palm-wine drinkard loses his tapster, and goes to seek him in Dead's Town. Although the English is ungrammatical, it is real – and Tutuola's own. The work has great oral directness. When Tutuola tried again (*My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, 1954; *The Brave African Huntress*, 1958, etc.) he found his old inspiration only in isolated passages. He is a natural, a naïve (q.v.), to whom thought – even in the sense of a professional writer's thought – is fatal. One cannot blame Tutuola's fellow Nigerians for feeling that he gave many (too many) white readers the opportunity to patronize African-ness (if not negritude, a concept wholly alien to Tutuola, who is still a good colonial servant): even at its best there is a tiny element of the 'I-am-a-funny-nigger-out-to-amuse-you-master' in his work.

The proper African novel in English developed very much later than the French, though it came earlier in the Caribbean (with McKay, q.v.). It has also been very different from the French: more integrationist in its beginnings.

**Chinua Achebe** (1930), born in Iboland, presents a complete contrast to any of his French counterparts, earlier or later. He is an intellectual, whose chief debt is not to any African writer but to such English novelists as George Eliot and Joseph Conrad (q.v.) – who, although a Pole, chose English as his means of literary expression. Achebe is penetratingly intelligent, and his realistic treatment of Nigerian life is as valuable anthropologically and sociologically as it is creatively. He was actively involved on Biafra's side in the Nigerian civil war. His first novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), is the tragic and moving story of Okonkwo and his village of Umuofia. Achebe is detached and cool – but more penetrative of the nature of both his Nigerians and his Christian missionaries than any previous African writer. *No Longer at Ease* (1960) is about Okonkwo's grandson Obi, turned into a corrupt civil servant by pressure of superstition and prejudice. *Arrow of God* (1964), set in the Twenties, in Eastern Nigeria, is about a chief priest who comes to trust an ignorant and essentially cruel British District Officer (portrayed by Achebe with great restraint). *A Man of the People* (1966) is more satirical and comic, and is not so effective as its predecessors. Its central episode is frighteningly reminiscent of the military coup in 1966, when many people were murdered. But its ending is contrived and weak. *Girls at War* (1971) collects short stories. Achebe believes that the writer should be 'in the thick of ... at the head of 'the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa': 'I am a protest writer', he has said, but 'Restraint – well, that's my style, you see'.

Achebe seems, possibly temporarily, to have lost his creative powers since the Sixties. But he has published books for the young, and has concentrated exclusively on educating them. He seems to have moved from literature to enlightened and constructive politics. (AWT; MAP)

**T.M. Aluko** (1918) is less substantial, but in his way as interesting and important as Achebe (q.v.). He is undoubtedly a comic novelist, and there is even a sense in which he has allowed his imagination more play than Achebe has. His *One Man, One Wife* (1959) was the first genuine Anglophone novel to be published in Nigeria. He has been accused of being frivolous and uncommitted; but this is to misread his work, and to see what is really comedy for a self-indulgent lack of control. Aluko is in fact doing what is absolutely necessary, even if a certain degree of detachment from politics on his part is inevitable: he is satirical of the more absurd aspects of the African tradition, but only as this exists in the context of imperialism. The satire is affectionate; but it is also deadly. Aluko is a vastly underrated and misunderstood novelist, possessed of great but unobtrusive skill. However, his earlier novels are on the whole his best (*One Man, One Wife, One Man, One Matchet*, 1964; *Kinsman and Foreman*, 1966), because in *Chief the Honourable Minister* (1970) and *His Worshipful Majesty* (1973) he has somewhat compromised: he tries to retain his sense of humour and yet injects some of the 'philosophical' depth of Achebe into his work. But the last-named novel showed greater self-confidence, and therefore some signs of a return to the earlier manner.

**Cyprian Ekwensi** (1921) is not on the level of Achebe or Aluko (qq.v.); but, despite his amateurishness, is of some importance. He began by writing for the local pulp market (*When Love Whispers*, 1948): cheap pamphlets, badly printed on bad paper. *When Love Whispers* is by no means a 'juvenile' book, as it has been described in a supposedly authoritative bibliography: it is a torrid and sensationalist romance. But it has qualities which raise it above its genre, which has not yet received very full study. Ekwensi went on to develop his talents – even while remaining an entertainer by intention – and, after writing many short stories, published *People of the City* (1954; rev. 1963), his first novel, a scrambled book with a poor plot – but with some acute criticism of city life, which transcends the literature of pure entertainment. *Jagua Nana* (1961) is a great improvement, and one critic even went so far as to suggest that it was better than anything Achebe had written. This is not the case; but, because the author's vitality is never damped down by extra-literary considerations – despite its frequently poor English – one at least sees what was meant. *Iska* (1966) is another unusual novel in that it presents its female characters with possibly more subtlety and understanding than that achieved by any other Anglophone African writer. It is also prophetic in its treatment of tribal factionalism. *Survive the Peace* (1976), set at the end of Nigeria's civil war (Ekwensi, like Achebe, supported Biafra), is his most serious and 'committed' novel. *Reckless City and Christmas Gold* (1975) contains some of his best stories. Ekwensi remains a too glib novelist, still not understanding why he should not follow the example of Edgar Wallace (Simenon, q.v., his other acknowledged master, is a different matter): his ideas are not interesting. But, curiously, his depiction of people, his instincts about the clash between tribalism and integrationism, his tender understanding of women, his idea of purity in conduct (no longer mawkish or sentimental): all these are very interesting and relevant. He is an odd example of a novelist who, almost by accident, does allow his imagination full rein – but at the cost of poor English and lapses into sensationalism which are wholly inappropriate. His work offers us a strange mixture – and is important on the African scene. (MAP)

The prose of **Onuora Nzekwu** (1928), another Nigerian, suffers from the same kinds of defect as that of Ekwensi (q.v.), but not to such a great degree. However, though neg-

lected (he is much less often mentioned than his contemporaries), he is not as gifted as Ekwensi. But he is a thoughtful and worthy writer. *Wand of Noble Wood* (1961), set in Lagos, resembles Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (q.v.), but is less profound, except that it has great documentary value in its detailed descriptions of Ibo marriage customs. Nzekwu cannot present the man torn between integrationism and the African past as Achebe does, because he is not really torn – he is a teacher, and his commitment to Westernization, or an 'Africanized' version of it, is unsophisticated and superficial; he remains exactly what he is, at heart, an Ibo who cannot come to terms with the modern. But he lacks the doubts of Achebe (and of Aluko, q.v., too, for that matter), and so his accounts of tribal customs have a dogged good heartedness, and benefit the reader by their simplicity and their understanding. It is a pity that his prose style is so dull and mechanical.

*Blade among the Boys* (1962) is a great improvement, though badly flawed. This deals with tribal rites (apparently 'disgusting') versus Roman Catholic 'morality'. Patrick Ikenga is the head of his family – both the living and the dead – but, educated by Catholics, he is also a novice. It is clear that Nzekwu intends this book to be a severe criticism of Roman Catholicism, and one can only sympathize in this context. But his treatment, though valuable as documentary, is not subtle or balanced enough. It is true that Roman Catholicism, the thing, has corrupted the truer and purer religious ceremonies of the Ibo (and of any other non-Christian tribe upon which it has forced itself). (Anthropologists who have tried to demonstrate otherwise have found themselves in deep waters indeed.) But this is not to imply, at all, that those who practise Catholicism are what Catholicism itself is, in terms of imperialism. . . . It would be ridiculous to pretend that there is no religious feeling in Catholicism – even if little of it is found in the Vatican, a merely bureaucratic headquarters. (This view is, after all, endorsed by many Catholics.) Nzekwu makes us feel that he is being unfair, in imaginative terms, even though he manages to convey the predicament of his protagonist with some sympathy. In *Highlife for Lizards* (1966), his best novel, Nzekwu has concentrated on Ibo life and its actual effect on individual persons; the language is still strained, but because the book is not polemical the sense of life is greater.

**Gabriel Okara** (1921), from Amatu in Nigeria, has evolved the most profound style of all the Anglophone novelists from his continent – especially in *The Voice* (1964). The protagonist, who has had a Western education, goes back to Amatu (Okara's own village, it will be recalled), in order to question everything. This is artificial in the ordinarily realistic sense; but Okara makes it convincing, not the least by his use of language. There are ways in which *The Voice* resembles a kind of *Invisible Man* (q.v. – I refer of course to Ellison's novel) – in reverse. Okolo, the protagonist, soon finds himself at odds with the conservative tradition in his native village (cf. Aluko, q.v.), and, after exiling himself to a nearby town, even finds himself in a lunatic asylum. He ends, not dead, but drifting in a canoe with, significantly, a witch (such people are the only ones who can remind him of his own values). It has been suggested that the novel fails because Okara gives no clue at all to the nature of Okolo's 'values' – but this reading also depends on the erroneous assumption that because he is set adrift he is wholly 'dead': he is just probably dead, possibly dead, feeling dead; the ambiguity is very important. This view is simplistic and lacks sensitivity: the 'it' of Okolo, his 'values', is itself just as elusive as Okara has made it. He might have written a more immediately successful novel by inventing some dogma and sticking it in place of the 'it' which so annoys simplistic critics who use authorial pessimism as a weapon to attack literary works. Okara's English, a superbly sensitive transposition of Ijaw syntax, shows this attitude to be wrong. Okolo is said by critics to be unsympathetic because he is isolated from the others; but then he is. . . . So ambitious a

novel could hardly have succeeded wholly; but in saying this one remembers that nothing ambitious, in this proper sense, has ever succeeded as a whole.

It is hardly surprising that Okara is also a poet, or that a sensitive reading of his poetry illuminates *The Voice*. His first collection (though he appeared in an undistinguished anthology called *Poetry from Africa*, 1968) is *The Fisherman's Invocation* (1978). (It is not helpful that Howard Sergeant, a good-hearted man who knows nothing about the difference between poetry and verse, should be one of his exegetes.) His poetry is highly original, with a sense of personal rhythm which is rarely found in Anglophone African poetry (or anywhere else, for that matter). Okara is modest and unassuming, and he has been badly misinterpreted when he has been interpreted at all. But he is possibly the most powerful of all African poets writing today – in any language. The manner in which his poems gather up strength and then end in a mixture of puzzled serenity and submerged fury is quite inimitable ('To Paveba' affords a fine example). He is an honest writer who has paid for his honesty. But his lyricism will eventually be recognized as the most intense of any African poet of the century. He is a far superior poet, for example, to Senghor (q.v.), for all the latter's philosophical posturings.



French-Caribbean literature developed much earlier than African. Despite the presence of Césaire (q.v.: he made a visit to Haiti in 1944, during the course of which some say – though the fact is by no means certain – he was able to overcome a serious impediment of speech which had afflicted him until that time, under the psychological impact of 'encountering an un-self-conscious awareness of being Creole'), Haiti is the only part of the French-Caribbean (Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guinea) to have evolved a national literature. The population of Haiti consists of a small dominant mulatto élite and some 90% Negroes, originally slaves from Africa. The official language is French, but French Creole is the language spoken by the vast majority. Since 1957 the Duvalier regime has ruled – the death of the mad 'Papa Doc', universally condemned as a criminal, has made little real difference, since his equally criminal son succeeded him (yet the Americans can invade Grenada in the interests of 'democracy', while leaving Haiti studiously alone; these Americans, exhibiting the anti-colonialist fervour for which they are famous, occupied the island from 1915 until 1934; curiously, the excuse for the invasion was not entirely different from the one used by Reagan in 1983 for the invasion of Grenada).

The dominant, and most influential figure, in Haitian literature has been **Jacques Roumain** (1907–44), who was himself of an élite mulatto family, and was educated in Europe and America. He was essayist, poet, diplomat, politician (he founded the Haitian Communist Party in 1934) but, above all, novelist. Roumain founded the *Revue Indigène* in 1927; it has been asserted that this magazine did no more than introduce French modernism into Haiti – the modernism of such as Cendrars, Marinetti or Apollinaire (qq.v.) – and that it gave its 'blessing to modern conformism in Haiti'. This may be disputed, and is certainly unfair on Roumain; suffice it to say here that Césaire (q.v.), a more derivative poet than he is usually taken to be, borrowed very heavily from a poem by Roumain in his own most famous poem. . . . Elaborate reasons put forward as to why this blatant lifting of passages from Roumain's poem were not simply thefts are unconvincing – especially the one that asserts that whereas Roumain was being communist Césaire was not. Césaire was in fact then communist – and far more prone to

ideological influence than Roumain, who was an ethnologist with an education and intellect far superior to those of Césaire. Roumain was an intelligent Marxian thinker; Césaire was a pragmatic Marxist activist.

Roumain wrote several novels, but by far the best is the last: *Masters of the Dew* (*Gouverneurs de la rosée*, 1944; tr. 1947), which abounds in creolisms, shows a true appreciation of the African aspect of Haiti's patrimony, and influenced *Disaffection* (1975), the first novel written in Creole – a dead end, perhaps, in itself, but a very important one – by Frank Éttiène (1936).

Two other important Haitians are Jacques-Stéphane Alexis (1922–61), whose *The Musical Trees* (*Les Arbres musiciens*, 1957) could not have been written but for the existence of Roumain – who figures in it under another name – and René Dépestre (1926), a poet who lives in Cuba and regularly denounces the false Haiti of the Duvalier regime, as well as the emerging Black middle classes' support of it. Alexis' *The Musical Trees* is a self-confessed exercise in 'magic realism' (q.v.), and – for all its derivations from Roumain's (q.v.) intelligently Marxian critiques of Haitian society – is really the first Haitian novel (with the exception of Roumain's last) to analyse in depth the nature of Haiti's own culture, which he perceptively sees as not merely African. Alexis was murdered – probably stoned to death – by agents of Duvalier. Dépestre's most influential poem has been *A Rainbow for the Christian West* (*Un Arc-en-ciel pour l'occident chrétien*, 1967; tr. 1972); this shows the influence of Alexis, but is far more dogmatically Marxist, and is less interesting as poetry than as polemic.

René Maran (1887–1960) has great importance in the history of the African novel. A Negro, he was born in Martinique, though of parents from French Guinea; but he lived and worked in Africa from early on – and later in his life, after writing many worthy but not outstanding books, he lost faith in everything – and he felt himself to be concerned mainly with African, and not with French-Caribbean, culture. *Batouala* (1921, with added chapter, 1948; tr. 1922), his finest book, was published at the behest of Henri de Régnier (q.v.), and won the Prix Goncourt. It is the simple story of an African chief, and its virtue lies in the fact that it is the first African novel to portray Negroes as Negroes, and not as white men in blackface. Furthermore, it demonstrates how such a society as the Ik of Uganda, well known from Colin Turnbull's account in *The Mountain People* (1972), can come into being: through utter deprivation.



Nothing like Maran's *Batouala* appeared before the Second World War in Francophone African fiction. However, strictly speaking, it is not an African novel, since Maran did have Caribbean parents and had lived, if only until an early age (his parents settled in Bordeaux) in Martinique: this fact does show in his text, for all its authentic Africanness. The first actually African novel in French, Bakary Diallo's *Righteous Strength* (*Force-Bonté*, 1926), was the work of an *évolué* (q.v.): it praises French colonialism in ecstatic terms, and is a fairly contemptible book.

Paul Hazoumé (1890), from Dahomey – since 1975 the People's Republic of Benin – produced a better novel, *Doguiçimi* (1938), which he completed in 1935. Dahomey (known in the Thirties as the 'Latin Quarter' of French Africa because of its many intellectuals) lies between Togo and Nigeria. *Doguiçimi*, which has not yet been translated into any other language, is the work of a distinguished ethnologist, but also of a product of the French colonial system; it is his only novel. To the careless reader it might seem to follow

in the tradition of *Force-Bonté*; but it stems from a vastly superior mind, and those critics who have dismissed it as an apology for colonialism, and no more, are obtuse: it contains another element, even if this be submerged. It is a historical novel set in the times of King Geso (the first half of the last century), ruler of Abomey (Dahomey), and, for all that its main character, the wife of the nobleman Toffa, expresses pro-French sentiments, the novel as a whole not only contains anti-colonial sentiments (powerfully expressed by Toffa himself), but also has an authentically African rhythm to it – as John D. Erickson, most perceptive of critics of African Francophone fiction, has demonstrated (*Nommo*, 1979). In itself, the book is an African novel written in French, not a French novel written by an African. It is a subtle novel which awaits translation – and not further exegesis by anti-colonialist critics: in itself, being a creative work, it is anti-colonialist.

## II

The Francophone African novel came into its own, however, with Camara Laye (1928–80), born in French Upper Guinea of a Malinke family. He began his literary career while he was a student in Paris. Although attacked for his alleged lack of commitment (his first book was enviously described as a ‘colonialist pot-boiler’ by African nationalists), he was in his lifetime the most serious French-language writer in Africa; no other novelist approached him in artistry, or in psychological insight. Laye grew up in Kouroussa, in an environment largely untouched by French colonialism. His father was a smith; since he was respected as a master not only of metalwork but also of magic, Camara Laye came to acquire a full understanding of an ancient, and now vanishing, way of life. *The Dark Child* (*L’Enfant noir*, 1953; tr. 1954) is an autobiography in fictional form: written lucidly and straightforwardly, it is a candid lament for the past; there is no resentment against colonialism. But, for all that, Laye’s imagination is ‘committed’ to the all-important matter of the preservation of his own (black) identity. The book’s chief importance is its unique evocation of Malinke traditions and customs. *The Radiance of the King* (*Le Regard du roi*, 1954; tr. 1956) is an ambitious allegory, written in colloquial style, on the theme of a white man’s search for a King he wishes to serve (not, as some have suggested, God – except in an ironic, ‘white’ sense). Undoubtedly influenced by Kafka (q.v.), this subtle novel operates on both a serious and a comically ironic level. The white man Clarence goes to Africa, loses his money, and is enslaved. Only at the end is he redeemed. This moves out of the negritude phase and into the integrationist. It has all the mysterious life and infinite suggestiveness of a great work of art. Two of its main themes are the search, by the ‘civilized’ European, for the irrational that eludes him (but not the African), and the necessity for the European and the African to meet.

In 1965 Camara Laye, who had served Guinea as a cultural ambassador, became wholly disenchanted with his country, seeing President Touré and his government as technological monsters who were ruthlessly suppressing all traditional values. He expressed his horror by going into exile to Senegal and too hurriedly writing *A Dream of Africa* (*Dramouss*, 1966; tr. 1968). This is a wooden book, in effect denouncing the events in Guinea which had disillusioned him. As fiction it simply does not live up to his disillusion, however much one sympathizes. Camara was already ill with a lingering disease, and it was not until 1978 that he was able to finish *The Wordmaster* (*Le Maître de la parole*). This is a weak retelling of the Malinke story of an ancient exiled King; but its weakness is wholly understandable. Camara Laye, whose illness and despair rendered him incapable

of supporting nine children (two by his second wife; seven by his first) by work at a research centre, was a victim of the cruel savagery of a section of his own people. But nothing can take from him the achievement of his first two novels. History has shown Camara Laye to be right in his assessment of his country: no one has freedom to express their own thoughts. It is appropriate that Touré should have condemned Camara to death *in absentia* – as well as spitefully and characteristically holding on to his wife in Guinea for many years.

Five more African Francophone novelists will be considered here: Ferdinand Oyono, Mongo Beti, Cheikh Hamidou Kane, Sembène Ousmane and Yambo Ouologuem. None of these is as good as Camara Laye in his first two novels, which are undoubtedly of the first order; but all possess manifold virtues and a considerable degree of versatility and originality.

Ferdinand Oyono (1929) comes from Cameroon (which became independent in 1961). He studied in Paris, worked as an actor, and then began to write. In 1961 he returned to Cameroon, where he has held a variety of diplomatic posts. He has published four novels, of which the first two are the best. *Houseboy (Une Vie de Boy)*, 1956; tr. 1966) is a novel in the form of a diary. This diary was originally written by Oyono in Ewondo, then translated by him into French. It describes Toundi Joseph's experiences at a Catholic Mission – but there is a short prologue, narrated by another, describing his death in Spanish Guinea. The diary consists of a deadpan record of how Toundi believed in the colonialists and in their values: he wants to become a true *évolué* (q.v.). But the colonists eventually destroy him. The value of the book lies in what Oyono is able to do with the persona of Toundi, 'Boy': for in all his reverence and his belief he demonstrates to the reader just how absurd and hypocritical the colonialists really are in their attitudes. It is full of ironies ('Since the white man came we have learnt other men must not be looked on as animals'), but the authorial attitude is not unfair to the colonialists, some of whom do – in their way – actually believe in the Africans as human beings. Further, *Houseboy* may be read, not simply as a satire on colonialism, but as the parable of what happens to the innocent everywhere in the world. Toundi is almost a 'holy fool'. Short, lucid, always economical, almost perfectly judged in its humour, this novel has not really been bettered by Oyono (he wrote it in Paris). *The Old Man and the Medal (Le Vieux Nègre et la médaille)*, 1956; tr. 1967) is a more obvious but nonetheless subtle attack (in effect – though Oyono never dehumanizes his characters to intensify his satire) on the 'good Negro' under colonialism – in other words, on the would-be *évolué*, the person who can never realize that the whole concept of 'assimilation' is a fraud, even if most often a well-intentioned one on the part of the European. It concerns a Christian cocoa farmer called Meka who is rewarded for his services to France by a medal – only when he actually receives it does he recognize its insignificance, and change his mind about his good and kindly masters. Although a comic novel, this has a serious core to it – but this, paradoxically, weakens it, not because Oyono is trying to go deeper, but because he uses somewhat over-obtrusive symbolism, and because the end is forced. *The Path to Europe (Chemin d'Europe)*, 1961) shows a marked falling off. Oyono fell under the spell of the *nouveau roman* (q.v.), and, although this novel cannot be placed in that category, its long and tedious passages reflect its inappropriate influence. It is about a youth who wants to go to France, and eventually gets there by a process of selling himself, lock, stock and barrel, to every form of hypocrisy. *Pandemonium (Le Pandémonium)*, 1971) shows Oyono still further lost in European techniques which are alien to his genius.

Mongo Beti (ps. Alexandre Biyidi, 1931) is the now established pseudonym of a French Cameroonian writer who wrote his first book (and one short story) under the name of Eza Boto. Unlike Oyono (q.v.), Beti has not returned to his own country since

1959, and has since vigorously attacked its politics in a full-length 1972 publication called *The Plundering of Cameroon (Main basse sur le Cameroun)*. He lacks the artistry of Oyono, but almost though not quite compensates for it in energy and verve. He has disclaimed his first novel, *Cruel Town (Ville cruelle, 1954)*, a sensationalist account of colonial exploitation which was promising only in its abundance of energy – the whole is very badly organized. With *The Poor Christ of Bomba (Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba, 1956; tr. 1971)* he matured greatly – though this is not his ‘masterpiece’, as it has been called. It deals with the efforts, against fierce resistance, of a French priest to convert all the people of Bomba; at the end he has to confess his failure, and is indeed condemned for his efforts. Just as in Oyono’s first book, the action is viewed through the diary of a native houseboy who believes implicitly in the ‘good father’, who in his own way is good. *Mission to Kala (Mission terminée, 1957; tr. 1958)* tells of the fate of an *évolué* (q.v.) who, because he is what he is, fails when he tries to go back to his village to reclaim his heritage. But Beti’s finest novel came in 1958: *King Lazarus (Le Roi miraculé, tr. 1960)*. In this book he once again treats of missionaries; but this time he is less crude and more comic, at the same time making a serious point. This is certainly Beti’s most enjoyable novel, and his least coarse. His humour is not as subtle as Oyono’s, but here at least it is more robust. The Chief of the Essazem Tribe falls mysteriously ill; his surrogate mother (actually his aunt), Yosifa, a Christian convert, baptizes him (she drenches him with water). The Superior of the Catholic Mission returns, to find the Chief lingering between life and death. When he recovers, the Superior exerts pressure on him to change his ways: give up his twenty-two wives and marry the twenty-third. But he will not name the wife he will keep. . . . The Chief remains transfixed between ‘conversion’ and ‘reversion’, but the tribe itself makes so much trouble that the Administrator has to tell the Superior that he must desist – and he is eventually sent away, at the Administrator’s request. This is a magnificent comic novel, weak only inasmuch as it tells us little about the deeper meaning of the tribal ways, preferring to treat these, too, as merely comic.

Beti had attacked Camara Laye (q.v.) for refusing to write to a ‘socialist realist’ formula. But when he ran into trouble over a lawsuit in his own country, and was jailed for a short time, he fell silent as a writer of fiction. He later explained (in the Sixties) that he did not wish (surprisingly) to be confined to politics: he wanted as a fiction writer to ‘feel free’ (just as Camara Laye had always done . . .). But by 1974 when he started to write fiction again Beti seemed to have gone back yet again on his intentions: the three novels he has produced since then are still political, if not quite so overtly as before. His theme is now the need for Africans to achieve their true independence, to discover themselves, to cast off for ever the notion of the *évolué*. But *Remember Ruben (1974)* – this title is in English – is a very uneven work, which, in its recreation of the days of the early Fifties when the Africans were fighting for their independence, contains superb passages, but also tedious and even irrelevant ones. It lacks cohesion, being a cross between a political novel and the story of one who returns and does rediscover himself – but that rediscovery, being too evidently political in its nature, does not entirely convince. Its sequel, *The Almost Laughable Ruin of a Buffoon (La Ruine presque cocasse d’un polichinelle, 1979)*, is more of a piece, and more intellectually interesting, but is still not psychologically convincing. *Perpétué (1974)* is simply long-winded and dogmatic. Beti cannot yet resolve the conflict between his ideological convictions and his imagination, though he wants to.

Cheikh Hamidou Kane (1928), a Muslim born in Senegal, presents a complete contrast. *Ambiguous Adventure (L’Aventure ambiguë, 1961; tr. 1963)*, which was well received and won a prize, deals at a more self-consciously philosophical – but no less imaginative – level with the ambiguous position of the African torn between his own African situation and that imposed on it, and him, by colonial (and Western) values. Kane has no clear

answer, except (almost) one: only by exploring the impossibilities of *négritude* (q.v.) by means of the imagination can any reconciliation ever be brought about. The novel's message is the novel itself, as it should be – with the important proviso that to Kane a certain kind of specific Muslim mysticism represents the only harmony accessible to man. In this not all readers can follow him. His vision is not merely pantheistic. The protagonist, Samba (the author's own 'house name', as he was the second son), spends his early years at a Koranic school, and learns to accept the mystery of God's Way. But then a relative insists that he be sent to Paris to learn European ways, and to integrate them with those of Islam. Thus is Samba spoiled. A Parisian education destroys his faith. He returns to Senegal, but it is too late: the companion of the Master of the Koranic school where he grew up slays him when he conscientiously refuses to take part in a Muslim family ritual. The novel is perfectly balanced, wholly unpolitical, and very strong in characterization. It is exquisitely done, as every critic agrees. But acceptance of its final message depends upon belief in a specifically Muslim sort of revelation. . . . So that in order for every reader, and not just Muslim mystics, to accept his religious message, Kane will somehow have to go further: to suggest a psychological state (not necessarily non-religious, but certainly more than only Islamic) in which peace on earth may be found. *Ambiguous Adventure* needs to be complemented, if Kane is to achieve what we call greatness (to which he has come almost as near as Camara Laye, q.v.). But he has still written one of the most outstanding of all African novels.

**Sembène Ousmane** (1923), son of a fisherman of the port of Ziguinchor, is a very different kind of Senegalese novelist. He was not educated in France; but he fought with the French army in Italy and Germany (an education in itself). He is a militant trade-unionist, and is now the best known novelist (and film-maker) in Senegal. He is a prolific and uneven novelist, much cruder than Kane (q.v.), but very effective in his way, and undoubtedly wider in his range. One thinks of James and Dreiser (qq.v.) in America: however exquisite the former, the latter supplied material that James did not. His first book, *The Black Docker* (*Le Docker noir*, 1956), based on his own experiences as a trade-union leader in Marseilles after the war, is coarse stuff, redeemed only by the vividness and sincere fury of its presentation of the plight of black dockers in France (which even under Mitterand has not much improved). *God's Bits of Wood* (*Les Bouts de bois de Dieu*, 1960; tr. 1970) is his best novel; here he learned, profitably, from Romain's *Les Hommes de bonne volonté* (qq.v.): he gives a panoramic view of various groups of people to great effect. The novel is based on the great strike of African railwaymen on the Dakar-Niger line (1947–8). The characters are full of life, and the sense of outrage (and official complacency) is rendered with a heartfelt immediacy. This is the novel of protest at its best; and in some of its moments it recalls Zola (q.v.), even though Zola was not (in fact) a novelist of protest. The Marxian approach is intelligent and well thought out (it is emphatically not 'Marxist-Leninist'), no character is manipulated in the interests of polemic, and the approach is balanced and fair. Outstanding among Sembène Ousmane's other works is the collection of stories *Man from the Volta* (*Voltaïque*, 1962). He is not a great writer, but he steadily produces good and illuminating books, and is unusual in that he can be leftist and yet not distort his material in the interests of leftist polemic. He is above all a humane and fair man, with a great gift for showing us the realities of the lives of the poor and the oppressed. This can be offensive only to *hommes de mauvaise volonté*. . . . He is a very much better writer than – to choose a famous example – Nexø (q.v.), for all the latter's dreary worthiness. He can tell historians and sociologists much more than they will ever learn in the finest textbooks.

**Yambo Ouologuem** (c1930), from Mali, began as a poet, and his best known poem, 'When Negro Teeth Speak', gives some idea of his wildness, his anger, his range, his

address – here are a few lines from the beginning:

Everybody believes I'm a maneater  
But you know the way people talk

Everybody sees my red gums but whose  
Are white  
Up with tomatoes

Everybody says the tourist trade will decline  
Now  
But just realise  
We aren't in America and anyhow everybody  
Is skint

Everybody says I'm to blame and is frightened  
But listen  
My teeth are white not red  
And I never ate a soul. . . .

Ouologuem (who is of Dogon ancestry) is prolific: he has written polemic, much lively pornography, a reader for elementary schoolchildren, and many stories, as well as poetry. But his one major work, flawed though it almost defiantly is, is *Bound to Violence* (*Le Devoir de violence*, 1968; tr. 1971). In this book Ouologuem freely borrowed from a number of writers, including Graham Greene (q.v., who made his publishers withdraw it until he deleted or rewrote the offending passages, which he has so far apparently refused to do). As I have indicated in my introduction, I think the literature of sly plagiarism is highly suspect – and no more so than in cases of creative inadequacy. But Ouologuem is different: he slings his books together (he does not 'compose' them) by drawing on whatever material happens to lie to hand. You will find Baudelaire (q.v.) by the side of an American writer of pulp thrillers, plus much that is by the author himself – and which is original (cf. Burroughs, q.v., whose own material is banal). There is no necessity to defend or attack in solemn terms Ouologuem's procedures, as was unconvincingly done in the case of the shabby, humourless British poeticule D.M. Thomas who, unable to write a properly imagined novel of his own, produced a bestseller by combining what appeared to be a set of tedious masturbation-fantasies – 'sopping cunts' and so forth – with slices out of the work of others (this was an example of gutter culture successfully posing as boulevard culture, q.v., and had simple-minded people saying that their 'lives had been changed' – a sort of Billy-Graham effect in reverse, and as short-lasting). Ouologuem is a genuine writer, and a genuine eccentric. His *Thousand-and-one Bibles of Sex* (*Les Mille et une bibles du sexe*, 1969) is pornography proper, just as that of Apollinaire (q.v.) is: it does not pose as high art. Ouologuem's act is to respect no one and he does it with verve, violence and some humour; and, despite learned objections, is African in an authentic – although disconcertingly unique – manner.

Ouologuem's *Bound to Power* covers the period 1202–1947. It sees the history of Africa as one of almost unrelieved violence and corruption. In the first part the history of the Nakem Empire is traced; by the end of the nineteenth century Saïf ben Isaac El Heit has come to power, and is in conflict with white colonialists (he loses). In the course of all this the author draws perhaps only apparently recklessly on any source to hand, including Arabic, Christian and Jewish lore. The modern part of the novel deals mainly with the

adventures of Raymond-Spartacus Kassoumi, who does about everything a man should not, and much that he could not. Ouologuem's main source for some parts of the book is a novel called *The Last of the Just* (*Le Dernier des justes*, 1959; tr. 1961), by André Schwarz-Bart, a Polish Jew who became French. He got into trouble for this, as he probably anticipated, since his publishers had issued the earlier work. But the joke (apparently never appreciated by any critic) is that Schwarz-Bart, by no means as good a novelist as Ouologuem (he is a sincere popular novelist, who is sentimental rather than 'moving', as he has been wrongly called: it is his material that is moving, not his treatment of it), had won the Prix Goncourt for this rather kitsch tale, and had himself been accused of plagiarism – and of 'exploiting' sex. It is therefore unsafe to be too serious about Ouologuem's plagiarism: he used this book as a cornerstone in a very proper if somewhat cruel contempt for it – and he chose appropriately, because its author had himself been accused of plagiarism and pornographizing. . . . The fact is that if Ouologuem plagiarized from Schwarz-Bart then Golding (q.v.) certainly plagiarized Ballantyne – but of course no one has accused him of this. Moreover, the charge of plagiarizing from Schwarz-Bart is somewhat akin to one of plagiarizing Mary Renault or Mary Stewart: this sort of thing is surely for any serious writer to make amused use of, unkind though it undoubtedly is.

Although sprawling, *Bound to Power* is not without subtlety and high satirical intelligence. It is the most savage attack on negritude (q.v.) yet made; but it does not extol Western values. It is by no means entirely nihilistic: it attempts to right the balance. Whereas most (but not the best) African writers have praised Africanism for its primitiveness and 'sublimity', Ouologuem demonstrates that the Africans are as human (i.e. both good and bad) as anyone else. It is a work not so much of excess as of exorcism (as Erickson insists): exorcism of 'idyllic Africa', a necessary process for any honest African, and a corrective to the sentimental and partly colonialistic views put forth by the essentially *évolué* Senghor (q.v.), who after all ended up as a not unpompous First President, a Catholic, and dedicated to an idealized and impracticable pan-Africanism. It hardly matters that negritude was an inevitable phase. Of course we have seen Ouologuem's message conveyed more subtly, for example in Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure* (qq.v.). But the very violence with which he has transmitted it has special value – and to take this humorous man too seriously is in any case to play into the hands of an earnestness which his work – for all its flaunted flaws and bold parodies of polite 'literature of allusion' (q.v.) – is most excellently against. It should also be noted that in his pornographic work *The Thousand-and-one Bibles of Sex* this author at least appears to portray French sexuality as pornographic and African as natural – which could be said to render this work not pornographic, but merely realistic and instructive. The contrast is between sex-with-fantasy and sex-as-sex: clearly Ouologuem is aware of it. That takes no fool.



Contemporary poetry in English and French is serious, but on the whole disappointing. This may well be because the indigenous traditions, of which Rabéarivelo (q.v.) and a few men of earlier generations were to make legitimate and less self-conscious use – they lived through a time of greater despair – are still so powerful. It must now be a little like trying to write poetry under the immediate shadow of Homer – or at least of a Homer who is still being performed.

The outstanding Nigerian poet is Gabriel Okara (q.v.), whose work has already been discussed. Others from this country are not as successful. **John Pepper Clark** (1935),

perhaps at his best as a dramatist, is fluent and sweet, but his poetry lacks originality, and he has not found his own voice. **Christopher Okigbo** (1932–67), killed fighting with the Biafran army, tried too self-consciously to combine indigenous poetry with the sophisticated modernist poetry of the West: this shows up in his poem to Yeats (q.v.), 'Lament to the Masks'. A literary critic could make this seem subtle and complex, and intelligent indeed it is; but the reader of poetry knows that Okigbo's true voice is lost in it, that it is synthetic. It is all very well to assert that Okigbo dwells on 'the disparity between man's ambition and his futile attempts to become God'; but that does not make a vital poetry. One can admire and be touched, but one cannot respond as one would heartily wish. There is much to be said about the intelligence of many of these African poets in English, but, as the perusal of a good anthology such as *Modern Poetry in Africa* (1963) – which also contains French and a few Portuguese poems – demonstrates, the vast majority of these writers have not succeeded in reconciling their indigenous heritage with their Western understandings (which are often false, though for unavoidable reasons). There can be excellent technique (Clark, Okigbo, qq.v.), and a fine sophistication; but these don't make poetry.

In French much the same applies. The only contemporary Francophone poet to break partly through the barrier – and he is by no means wholly satisfying – is **Tchicaya U Tam'si** (ps. **Felix Tchicaya**, 1931), from Congo (Brazzaville). U Tam'si has lived mostly in France, and although he has considerable lyrical gifts and a deep understanding of Bantu poetry, the fact of his residence has given his work a heavy intellectual overlay which is hardly suitable to it. He has tried to adapt Bantu poetry, which is essentially oral, to a special kind of French oral poetry which will, however, be effective on the page as well. His earlier angry topical satire on the death of Lumumba – he was in the Congo at the time – was more effective than his 'personal' poetry. But at times his attempts to express his erotic nature do acquire vitality – a vitality apart from critical exegeses that merely tell us about the intellectual structure of his poems – and then his poetry comes to life. The influence of Césaire (q.v.) is very marked, but has not been fatal. *Selected Poems* (tr. 1970).

### III

The most effective Negro playwright from Africa and the Caribbean has been Césaire (q.v.), whose work has already been discussed. But the Africans have a dramatic heritage upon which to draw, and they have made better use of it than they have in poetry. Many of the earlier African plays (in both languages) tended to use African myth as an anti-colonial message; they were effective in the theatre at the time they were produced, but were more ephemeral than drama usually is. They are interesting in terms of politics, but not of literature. The least ineffective of them were adopted from Yoruba legend.

The leading African playwright is undoubtedly **Wole Soyinka** (1934); his plays have been widely performed. He is also a poet and novelist; competent and sensitive but not outstanding. His plays use much African material – as is natural – but they aim, Soyinka insists, beyond matters African. His first major play, *The Dance of the Forests* (1963), was commissioned for the Nigerian Independence Celebrations. In this work Soyinka does in dramatic form what Ouologuem (q.v.) did in *Bound to Violence*: insists that the African past is not idyllic. *The Road* (1965), which was produced in London in 1965, and is one of his best plays, is set in an impoverished republic which has long gained its independence: it is going to pieces, and so are its inhabitants. The protagonist is a half-mad professor

who is trying to discover the meaning of death. *The Road* relies on an elaborate use of ritual, and is very evidently African – but Soyinka has drawn as much from Greek tragedy as he has on African material. Indeed, in 1973 he adapted Euripides' *The Bacchae*, showing that he had a thorough understanding of what he was doing in his theatre (he has been an actor, and has produced many plays). *Madmen and Specialists* (1971) is about a doctor who turns inquisitor: his father tries to show him what he has become by inventing a cannibalistic cult. Doubtless the fury expressed in this play arose from the fact that Soyinka was for two years a political prisoner (during the Biafran war), and was lucky to remain alive (*The Man Dies: Prison Notes*, 1972). When the son kills his father, the latter tries to purge him of his lack of humanity in a scene, which, once again, owes quite as much to Greek theatre as it does to African legend. Essentially Soyinka has taken the Western play as his model, and used African ritual only to a very carefully limited extent. The language of his plays is not inspired; but he remains an effective and intelligent dramatist.

**John Pepper Clark** (1935), whose mellifluous poetry has already been mentioned, is not a 'Renaissance Man', as someone has called him; but his plays are his best work, even though he is as concerned with criticism and poetry and teaching (at the University of Lagos). He also founded and edits *The Horn*, a magazine based at Ibadan. His best play is his first: *Song of a Goat* (1964), which was seen in London in 1965. This resembles Soyinka in that Clark takes Greek drama as his model. The story is simple: a man becomes impotent, his main wife sleeps with his younger brother, who hangs himself; but the sterile protagonist also kills himself, in shame. The play is good, but is much weakened by the attempt to make it 'Greek': Clark is not as good at this as Soyinka (q.v.), who really needs to do it, and who could not manage without it. Still, the characterization is powerful and the play genuinely tragic. The successors to this play unfortunately work much less well, and at times Clark is (as has been said) reminiscent of Fry (q.v.), a most pernicious influence and an indication that there may be something fundamentally wrong with Clark's taste.

**Obi Egbuna** (1938), a Nigerian who has written novels and stories as well as plays based on them, has written one interesting and original comedy: *The Anthill* (1965). This is really a farce, and it shows that Africans can write these as well as anyone else: this is bound to be played for many years to come. Egbuna is a militant advocate of 'Black Power', and was locked up in England for it (*Destroy This Temple: The Voice of Black Power in Britain*, 1971); but in *The Anthill*, which centres on a man who paints only anthills, he has produced a frothy and funny comedy almost worthy of Wilde (q.v.).

The Ghanaian **Efua Sutherland** (1924) is a woman of the theatre: the person behind most theatrical activity in her country, in which she still lives. She is particularly concerned with children's drama. She has designed two theatres. She has adapted Euripides' *Alcestis*, as *Edufa* (1967), and has in *Foriwa* (1967) written a 'street play', a rather sentimental but effective work about the need for co-operation and the rejection of tribalism.

**Ama Ata Aidoo** (1942), another Ghanaian, is a more serious playwright; she has written a novel, *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977), and a collection of stories, *No Sweetness Here* (1970). She does not write in the mainstream, inasmuch as she looks for solutions in tradition, though not in any conservative manner. (The usual approach is to look for the best of both worlds in an unthoughtful way.) *The Dilemma of a Ghost* (1965) is about an African who goes to England and brings back a black American wife. It deals sensitively with the weakness of the husband, who cannot assert himself. *Anowa* (1970) is historical: set in Africa under the reign of Queen Victoria. Anowa rebels against her parents and marries a man they consider a no-good. The couple prosper in trade; but they are unable

to live happily together, and each commits suicide. This play is feminist, but in a subtle and convincing – never over-strident or unrealistic – way.

But it is Soyinka (q.v.) alone who is a major dramatist in Africa. The ancient dramatic tradition of Africa, with its drums, its all-important dance, and its attendant ritual, offers a great temptation to any dramatist – but then so, of course, do the techniques of the modern theatre, and some of its stars (such as Tennessee Williams, q.v.). Only Soyinka has succeeded in making full use of the ancient tradition without falling back falsely into it.

In French only **Bernard Dadié** (1916) need be mentioned. Dadié, from the Ivory Coast, is important as a novelist and poet; but his plays are outstanding. He served in the government administration in Senegal, and set up a theatre; later he became Minister of Culture of his own country. Dadié is frankly what he is: an *évolué* and a political optimist (he produced embarrassing odes to Houphouët-Boigny, who so to say deserved them – ‘You are the people/You are the Master’); but he has been sincere, and a subtle and illuminating writer. The novel *Climbié* (1956; tr. 1971) is autobiographical, and traces with dignity and skill the progress of an African whose acceptance of white rule is transformed into hatred for it. His other novels, and, in particular, his retelling of African Legends, *Légendes africaines* (1953), are excellent; but it is in the theatre that he excels: in the farce *Monsieur Thôgô-gnini* (1970), which is in form a kind of cross between Molière and Jarry (q.v.), and, above all, *Stormy Islands (Îles de tempête)*, 1973), which deals with Toussaint L’Ouverture (the slave who became ruler of Haiti, but who hesitated over the declaration of independence too long; the Napoleon whom he admired imprisoned him). The technique of this play is modernistic, and effectively so; but what is outstanding is Dadié’s ability to treat the protagonist as a human being as well as a legendary hero.

## IV

African literature in Portuguese is lively and interesting, but is not well known outside the ex-Portuguese countries and Portugal itself. In poetry no one has really distinguished themselves, although as a body of work Afro-Portuguese poetry is interesting, a ‘cry of agony and loss’, as has been rightly said. Most of the activity has come from Angola, and the most important of Angolan writers is certainly the blind mulatto **Oscar Ribas** (1909), who has written poetry, stories and novels. Nothing better than his short-story collection *Echoes of My Land* (1951) has come out of Portuguese Africa. This, and his other work, is particularly important because there is little vernacular literature in Angola, and it is Ribas above all others who has been able to combine immense anthropological knowledge with creative ability. The rest of Afro-Portuguese literature is still in a formative phase, largely no doubt because the Portuguese were so late in hanging on in Africa – but also because of other factors. Unfortunately Ribas awaits a translator.

## V

George Lamming (q.v.) pointed out in 1960 that ‘the West Indian novel, by which I mean the novel written by the West Indian about the West Indian reality, is hardly twenty years old’. The main reason for this has been the high rate of illiteracy in the West Indies (I

refer here to the formerly British islands, and to Guyana), the direct responsibility of British administrators, whose nineteenth-century policy towards education of the Negroes has rightly been described as 'criminal'. And it is as well to remember that the language of the West Indian novelist is an English which veers, not always easily, between what authorities call West Indian Standard (the correct language, surely, for West Indians), English Standard – and, of course, the dialects.

The first professional West Indian novelist was the Jamaican **Claude McKay** (1890–1948), who was also a poet. McKay went to America to study just before the First World War; there he discovered the American Negro W.E.B. DuBois' *The Souls of Black Folk*. (DuBois and Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican described by McKay as a charlatan, were the two great founding – and feuding – fathers of Pan-Africanism; DuBois, mocked by Garvey for his light skin, believed in the maintenance of the black diaspora; Garvey did not.) Financed by a man named Gray ('there was a greyness in his personality like the sensation of dry sponge'), McKay in 1920 visited England, but was disappointed. His poetry is in a Victorian idiom and is of little value; but his fiction, which he began writing in the late Twenties, is of more interest: his novels are: *Home to Harlem* (1928), *Banjo* (1929) and *Banana Bottom* (1933), described by Kenneth Ramchand as the 'first classic of West Indian prose'. This is a vivid and affirmative evocation of Jamaican village and town life, and a skilful portrait of a woman's achievement of freedom from social and racial fear. It contains also a memorable portrait of an itinerant musician, Crazy Bow:

You may wrap her up in silk,  
You may trim her up with gold,  
And the prince may come after  
To ask for your daughter,  
But Crazy Bow was first.

Many West Indian novelists are now better known than McKay, but few have bettered his work.

There was a general exodus of West Indian novelists to London in the early Fifties: to a place where they could feel the presence of readers. After the Second World War the British Broadcasting Association ran a programme called 'Caribbean Voices', and magazines started up (*Bim* in Barbados, *Focus* in Jamaica, *Kyk-over-Al* in what was to become Guyana); but the obstacles to local recognition remained formidable. Two novelists were in the forefront: **Edgar Mittelholzer** (1909–65), who set fire to himself in a field after writing a novel with just such a suicide as its main incident, and **Roger Mais** (1905–55), who had already distinguished himself as a short-story writer and poet in Jamaica in the Thirties and Forties, but who did not become a novelist until the last three years of his life – two of which were spent in London, although he died in Jamaica.

Mittelholzer was an uneven, over-prolific novelist, whose work consists of ghost stories, Gothic horror tales, historical fiction and studies of decayed gentry. His novels of the past, despite fine passages, are spoilt by an indulgence in the erotic for its own sake; better is a more straightforward novel such as *A Morning at the Office* (1950), an acutely observed and painful account of racial division. In Mittelholzer the humanist observer and the neo-romantic experimentalist jostle against one another uncomfortably, and seldom work together. Possibly his best book is the autobiographical *A Swarthy Boy* (1963). It is a tragedy that his last terrible gesture should have been real as well as fictional.

Mais wrote three novels, *The Hills Were Joyful Together* (1953), *Brother Man* (1954) and

*Black Lightning* (1955). These have been collected as *The Three Novels of Roger Mais* (1966). The first two are grim sociological studies of poverty and prison life; they are of very high quality. The third is one of the few successful accounts in modern fiction of a Christ-like figure. Bra'Man's followers reject him; but he is saved by sexual love. This portrait of a holy man is neither Christian nor Reichian – and is convincing and original.

West Indians of a younger generation who have written good novels include: **George Lamming** (1932), from Barbados, whose finely written *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953) and *The Emigrants* (1954) are autobiographical; **Andrew Salkey** (1928), born in Panama of Jamaican parents, who gives accurate and sometimes depressing pictures of Jamaican life in *A Quality of Violence* (1959) and *Escape to an Autumn Pavement* (1960); **John Hearne** (1926), another Jamaican (born in Canada), whose *The Faces of Love* (1957) brilliantly examines the insecurity of a mulatto woman; and **H. Orlando Patterson** (1926), a sociologist, whose *The Children of Sisyphus* (1965) gives a vivid and sympathetic account of the Rastafarian cult.

Most of these novelists added fruitfully to their *œuvres*. Lamming's *Natives of My Person* (1972), his sixth novel, is probably his finest book – at least it is his most mature and original. It takes the crude and false legends of the West Indies as they exist in Western consciousness (Lamming, like so many West Indian writers, lives in London), and weaves them together into a fantastic and imaginative extravaganza, half satirical but half poetic. It is a difficult work, written in what at first sight seems to be pastiche of seventeenth-century voyagers' prose. But the style is really very much Lamming's own – which, in an age in which pastiche as a technique is far too often taken for granted, is an achievement.

Andrew Salkey wrote his best novel in *The Late Emancipation of Jerry Stover* (1968), a scaring and heartfelt attack on the state of Jamaica in the period just before it achieved its unhappy independence. *The Adventures of Catullus Kelly* (1969) has been called 'weak'; but its experimental form, including the use of both English and dialect, was absolutely necessary – and the picture given of a young Jamaican going mad in London is quite unforgettable, and, although sometimes comic, deeply moving. This book is far more imaginative than the majority of critics granted: they saw it as polemic, quite forgetting that the most important figure in it, and the most important theme, is the personality of the used-up protagonist. Salkey has edited much West Indian material, and written a number of good books for young people. He is an author whose subtleties have not received their full due.

John Hearne has stayed in Jamaica, and his work has on the whole declined (though not for that reason). He has taken to writing crude thrillers in collaboration, and these have no point except to entertain (some): the effort has weakened his sense of reality. *The Faces of Love* remains his best book.

H. Orlando Patterson, whose fiction is certainly underrated – mainly perhaps, and very unjustly, because he has now become a sociologist of universally recognized importance: *The Sociology of Slavery* (1967) and *Ethnic Chauvinism* (1977) are both essential books. But he does something in fiction that he cannot do in his other works. There have been two new novels: *An Absence of Ruins* (1967) and *Die the Long Day* (1972). Both are bleak and pessimistic studies in absolute alienation, and are so well achieved that they reach that high level at which it can only be said that the one affirmative answer provided by them lies in the fact that they were written at all. Developments in Jamaica under Michael Manley and then under Seaga cannot have encouraged any of its enlightened natives, and perhaps these books reflect the earlier stages of the deterioration (which led to the massive election victory of the American-trained Seaga, a sinister figure whose harmfulness has not yet been fully seen, since Jamaica can never for long remain an American client-state – and for whose emergence the younger Manley must take much responsi-

bility). But at least Patterson's protagonists do understand, if dimly, that mental freedom from slavery is possible.

But the most gifted of Caribbean novelists – he is probably as gifted in his very different way, though not as fulfilled, as V.S. Naipaul (q.v.), who has been dealt with as an English novelist – is **Wilson Harris** (1921), from Guyana. In certain respects his approach is nearer to that of such writers as Patrick White (q.v.) – on whom he has written and by whom he has been influenced – and even Alexis (q.v.) than to his Caribbean contemporaries. He is not without a certain pretentiousness, but this, as we have seen in the case of White, is almost unavoidable. His comments on his work are not as good as the work itself. But he is superior to Carpentier (q.v.), and his novels, taken together, do something similar to what Carpentier was trying to do: to explore the interior through giving a view of the exterior. He has a few devotees (as he should), but has not yet reached the wider public which he deserves. Some criticism of him is unhelpful and obscurantist, but this may well be because his work is not as accessible as he could, without loss to its integrity, make it. *The Guiana Quartet* (*Palace of the Peacock*, 1960; *The Far Journey of Oudin*, 1961; *The Whole Armour*, 1962; *The Secret Ladder*, 1963) forms the most thorough picture of Guyana ever given or likely to be given; its re-interpretation of a complex past in contemporary terms is convincing and very rich in detail. *Ascent to Omai* (1970) and the four novels which preceded it were less successful: too mystical, too fragmented on the surface – the experimentalism of these narratives was not sufficiently compelled. Newer novels display more humour, and get away from the Caribbean – which Harris needed to do. The best are *Da Silva da Silva's Cultivated Wilderness* (1977) and its sequel *The Tree of the Sun* (1978), in which the protagonist is a painter, a kind of surrogate for Harris himself. But this important and in a sense still neglected writer needs to develop a wholly suitable language: he has never yet been quite unself-conscious enough, and his intellect has obtruded so much into his fiction that it now quite certainly needs a rest. His is an imagination that requires strict control; but not so intentionalist a one. He has written poems (*Eternity to Season*, 1954; rev. 1979) which are very ill accomplished, but which (for example 'Troy') give invaluable clues to his novels. It may be that Harris' work is somewhat vitiated by the fact of a basic pessimism which he cannot cast off: myth is greater than history, but no man can understand myth – so he tries to destroy it. It is a grand and universal enough theme.



**Tom Redcam** (ps. **Thomas Macdermot**, 1870–1933), novelist as well as versifier, was the unpromising colonial father of West Indian poetry. A slightly better poet was **W. Adolphe Roberts** (1886–1962), born in Kingston (CV); but it was McKay (q.v.) who – even if not a good poet – brought the necessary theme of Africa into Caribbean poetry. The best Thirties poet was Roger Mais (q.v.). The form in which he was finally to find himself, shortly before his early death, was the novel; but his free verse and his manner show that he fully realized that Caribbean verse, to achieve anything beyond 'local colour', must break free of sunlight, sea – and the Victorian poetical poesy. Love, he knew, spoke 'With accents terrible, and slow'. Clearly he had read the imagists (q.v.), and his poetry has a sharpness otherwise entirely lacking in the West Indian poetry of the period. His now celebrated 'All Men Come to the Hills' was in part an exhortation to his countrymen to give up the touristic sun and sea and look at the nature of Jamaican society. (CV)

But **Derek Walcott** (1930), born in St. Lucia, is the only truly outstanding contem-

porary Anglophone Caribbean poet and playwright. Walcott has a superb ear, knows his limitations (important in a poet) and is intelligent without allowing this to undermine his initial poetic impulse. As well as effective plays, he has published a dozen books of poems (*Selected Poems*, 1964, and *Selected Poems*, 1977, are the best guides to his achievement). His poetry gives a record, often in exuberant language, of growth to maturity against a West Indian background more fully and truthfully and painfully realized than in any previous West Indian poetry. His play *Dream on Monkey Mountain* was published in London (1972). But his more recent work, especially since the long poem *Another Love* (1973), an attempt to write his own *Prelude* in shorter compass, and a failure, has lessened in tension. On the other hand his plays (e.g. *O Babylon!*, 1976) are improving in theatrical effectiveness. He lives in Trinidad.

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# American Literature

## I

Henry James' (q.v.) statement, made in a letter of 1872, that 'it's a complex fate, being an American, and one of the responsibilities it entails is fighting against a superstitious valuation of Europe' is hackneyed; but it sums up, with splendid aptness, the heart of the American dilemma at the time he wrote it. (In 'Europe', of course, he included England: the parent country whose political, but not literary, shackles had been wholly thrown off.) The Americans as a whole were slow to recognize their native geniuses: no country likes to discover its true nature too quickly. Emerson was widely acknowledged and highly influential, but, although a major writer, he was not a major creative writer. The American public took Longfellow, an inferior poet, to its heart, but was not happy with Melville; and Whitman – the first wholly American poet – was to the end of his life read only by a minority which misunderstood the nature of his achievement, leading to the establishment of a legend that took more than fifty years to dispel. Many Americans of the nineteenth century tended to regard their own literature patronizingly, as an inferior cousin of English literature: they reckoned that English earth, and not that of America itself, the new country, was the proper place for its roots.

This situation has now changed drastically. If there is a cultural capital of the English-speaking world, then it is New York – that it might be London is now no more than a joke. Since America is by far the bigger and more varied country, and since English literature has temporarily exhausted itself, it is not surprising that this state of affairs should have come about. What is more interesting is how American self-discovery developed into a major world literature. This may be seen most clearly in the way American writers discovered and achieved realism.



America had her indisputably great nineteenth-century writers: Melville, who failed to achieve real success and was forced to spend all but six of his last twenty-five years as a customs inspector; Whitman, who had even less popular success; Hawthorne, who did achieve fame with *The Scarlet Letter*, but who was not fully understood. But these had done their best work by the end of the Civil War: Hawthorne died (1864), Melville 'retired' to his custom-house, Whitman began his long decline into mage-hood, and added little of consequence to *Leaves of Grass*. Few in the quarter-century after the Civil War would have thought of these writers as particularly important. The fashion was first for the so-called 'Brahmin' (the name was good-naturedly applied by analogy with the highest caste of Hindus) poets and thinkers (Longfellow, J.R. Lowell, Holmes, Prescott and others), centred in Boston – once revered, then too severely misprized, now more temperately revalued as creatively limited but tolerably liberal gentlemen – and later for

such popular pseudo-realist fiction as that written by 'the Beau Brummell of the Press', **Richard Harding Davis** (1864–1916), a clever newspaper reporter, the more skilful romantic novelist **F. Marion Crawford** (1854–1909), every one of whose forty-five novels has dated, the solid 'conscientious middle-class romantic' historical novelist **Winston Churchill** (1871–1947), and the more gifted **O. Henry** (ps. **William Sidney Porter**, 1862–1910), a writer of short stories of humour and technical adroitness (his speciality was the surprise ending) but no psychological depth. The more important writers were not at first much heeded. But there is a major exception: **Mark Twain** (ps. **Samuel Langhorne Clemens**, 1835–1910), a nineteenth-century figure the importance of whose legacy to the twentieth is beyond question. The 'Brahmin' James Russell Lowell as well as the so-called 'literary comedians' ('Artemus Ward', 'Josh Billings', 'Bill Arp' and so on) of the Fifties and Sixties had tried to create a truly indigenous prose style, and had failed. In *Huckleberry Finn* (1884), sequel to *Tom Sawyer* (1876), Twain portrayed a complex but free American boy, in genuinely American prose; he also wrote a great novel of innocence and experience. But, like Whitman, Twain was a naïve American novelist of the latter half of the nineteenth century. He had also lived close to nature and to the experience of action. He could always write directly and uninhibitedly of experience; but only once, in *Huckleberry Finn*, did he produce a masterpiece. The realists were, however, for the most part sentimentive (q.v.) writers. They admired Twain – Howells (q.v.) was his friend and collaborator – but could not emulate him; nor, to do them justice, could he help them much in their aims: to portray truthfully, and to anatomize psychologically, American urban society.

Howells, James (q.v.) and the other realists had honourable precursors: writers whose realism was more than nominal, superficially regional – in the sense of patronizingly recording quirks and customs – and fashionable. Such was **John William De Forest** (1826–1906), who influenced Howells. De Forest, born in Connecticut, fought as a captain on the Union side; he wrote a number of readable novels, the most important of which is *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty* (1867). This is didactic and its plot is sentimental, but its realism consists not of photographic set pieces but of a serious examination of the origins of the 'Southern' prejudices of Lillie, daughter of an abolitionist New Orleans doctor who has voluntarily come north at the outbreak of the war. Particularly well done is the portrait of one of her suitors, John Carter, a Virginian officer in the Union army, dashing, dissipated, heroic, morally ambiguous. It was in his battle scenes, however, that De Forest was most in advance of his time. His more happily titled *Honest John Vane* (1875), about a corrupt congressman, is also realistic in its study of political background.

The clergyman **Edward Eggleston** (1837–1902), founder of a 'Church of Christian Endeavour' in New York, was one of the best of the many regionalists then writing. Encouraged by J.R. Lowell, and an important influence on Hamlin Garland (q.v.), Eggleston described Indiana backwoods life in *The Hoosier School-Master* (1871), based perhaps on the experiences of his brother. Overall this is a sentimental and didactic novel, but it is important for the author's use of Indiana dialect and the realism of some isolated passages. Eggleston wrote a number of other novels, none as good as this, but nearly all distinguished by some realist facet. **Edgar Watson Howe** (1853–1937), who was born in Indiana, was another forerunner – one who lived to see the aftermath. Howe was essentially a small-town sage, in the American tradition; a sort of provincial H.L. Mencken (q.v.). He edited newspapers and magazines, produced cynical and homely aphorisms, and wrote memoirs. But when a young man he wrote one powerful though crude novel of the midwest: *The Story of a Country Town* (1883). Howe was not a good novelist, and the plot of this book is so melodramatically pessimistic as to be absurd. It is

also at times monotonous, though on the whole thoroughly readable – hence its availability in paperback. But Howe's savage misanthropy caused him to look for unpalatable facts, and since he was intelligent as well as completely sincere (as Mark Twain told him) Howe selected some facts that had not previously been presented in fiction. Howe's picture of midwestern life and human scullduddery and scullduggery (for example, the stern patrician farmer-preacher turns out to be a randy hypocrite) is not vivid – but is more truthful than anything that had preceded it in its category, and with its intended scope. It helped to set a tone for such later writers as Sherwood Anderson (q.v.). For all its faults, *The Story of a Country Town* concentrates into itself a quintessentially American attitude: politically neither 'left' nor 'right', its main thrust is at the reality of small-town life as distinct from the legend of respectability. The battle is still being fought.

**William Dean Howells** (1837–1920), son of a newspaperman and printer, was born in Ohio. During the middle years of his long life Howells was considered by most critics to be the doyen of American writers. He was important not only as a pioneer realist, but also as a judicious and generous – but not indulgent – critic of the American writers of half a century, and as the introducer of much vital foreign literature. As a young man Howells, who knew how to get on, was taken up and blessed by Brahmin culture. He wrote a campaign life of Lincoln (1860) and was rewarded with the consulate at Venice, where he spent the years of the Civil War. Highly thought of by his elders, Howells joined the *Atlantic* in 1866 and soon became its editor (1871), and printed both their work and that of promising newcomers such as Henry James (q.v.). During the Seventies he began to form his ideas about fiction and to write novels. The best of these came between 1881 and 1892. Howells' reputation declined during his final year, and he was in due course equated with Victorianism, prudery (it was unfairly asserted that he had 'censored' Mark Twain) and facile optimism. Now Howells was a 'gentleman', and he did not think it right to be profane, obscene or gloomy; nor did he have the genius of Mark Twain. But he was not a pre-Freudian relic: his criticism is still valuable, and the best of his fiction has subtlety and depth. It comes from a mind that, even while it believed in a 'respectable' facade, was well aware of the violent impulses that rage beneath the surface of consciousness: he knew and admitted (to Twain) that the whole 'black heart's-truth' about himself could not be told. This would be something that came later. But if Howells was 'polite', then so, it must be admitted, was James. That the whole truth could not be told was something that not more than one nineteenth-century liberal gentleman in ten thousand would admit; not many gentlemen will admit it now.

Howells' achievement is a monument to what can be done in literature without genius. To understand him it is necessary to have a taste for 'both James and Twain'. . . . Certainly, if we are levelling charges of gentility, it is grossly unjust to dismiss Howells and yet absolve James. For it was Howells above all who helped to make the decently written novel an acceptable form in America: who helped American readers to understand that fiction, too, could have a 'moral' message – that the absolutely serious writer need not confine himself, as had Howells' mentors; to the oracular essay or to verse. And his own best novels courageously, if never dynamically, examined American mores. *Dr Breen's Practice* (1881) traces the private and public fortunes of a woman doctor; it sympathizes with her ambitions, though in making her a puritan fit for satire Howells reveals, perhaps with deliberate slyness, lurking anti-feminist prejudice. Howells had a sense of the outrage men inflict on women, but could not overcome his fear. James entered into his fear, and therefore could depict women. His two best novels are *A Modern Instance* (1882) and *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885), both of which were more unusually subtle and penetrating for their time than is realized today. *A Modern Instance*, which handles divorce and got Howells blamed for both over-boldness and 'moral timidity', is a study in the

spiritual squalidity of a relationship in which hatred has replaced attraction (not, I think, love). This, written under the direct influence of Zola (q.v.), is Howells' boldest book. In *The Rise of Silas Lapham* Howells satirized the hollow snobbishness of Brahmin families (reflecting his committedness to his own kind) and at the same time showed how a vulgar, self-made man could attain moral authority. Lapham is a brash paint-manufacturer with high social ambitions for his family. He is humbled and forced out of Boston society because, although his way to wealth has been ruthless, he refuses to commit a dishonest act; thus he grows in stature, but, as Howells remarks, 'It is certain that our manners and customs go for more in life than our qualities'. Some critics have hailed the panoramic *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890) as Howells' best work – and so it might be if it had the power of the psychological novels. After *An Imperative Duty* (1891) Howells' fiction became more self-consciously didactic and illustrative of the Tolstolian socialism he had now adopted. But until the very last novel, *The Leatherstocking* (1916), published when he was seventy-nine, he maintained his high standards of craftsmanship and style. It is, strangely enough, this last book – a moving study of a historical character, an Ohio smallholder of the mid-nineteenth century, who persuaded a number of women to regard him as God – that is the least didactic of them all.

It is probably right to regard Howells as one of the native sources of what we may call the naturalist (q.v.) strain in American fiction – if only because others followed where he led. But his own realism was never really naturalistic, even in *A Modern Instance*. Howells' rudimentary *The Story of a Country Town* was nearer. The fact is that there is always something 'ungentlemanly' about true naturalist fiction – even when, as it seldom is, it is written by gentlemen such as Frank Norris (q.v.). Howells was also, and more obviously, an exemplar for – and frequently an encourager of – the other American realists who eschewed naturalism. Many of these, both major and minor, were temporary or permanent expatriates. If you stayed in the new America, it seems, you thought you understood it in assured, scientific, Darwinian – evolutionary – terms: you were a sort of determinist. Otherwise your impulse was to escape from a reality that you could neither deny nor affirm.

Escapism at its most obvious is seen in the case of the eccentric **Lafcadio Hearn** (1850–1904). Hearn was born on the Aegean island of Santa Maura (once called Leucadia, hence his name) of Irish-Greek parentage, with a goodly admixture of gypsy, English and Arabic – but no American – blood. However, he spent twenty-one years (1869–90) in America as a journalist before sailing for Japan, where he married into a Japanese Samurai family, raised children, turned Buddhist, and became a lecturer in English literature at the Imperial University at Tokyo. (His successor was Natsume Soseki, q.v.). As a journalist Hearn presented himself as a believer in the evolution of human society into complex higher forms; but really he wanted to get away from the ruthless drive that this 'evolution' implied. When competitiveness became increasingly evident in the life of Meiji Japan Hearn made plans to return to the States, but died before he could put them into effect. His real inclinations are revealed in the exotic character of his novels, *Chita* (1889), about a girl who survives a tidal wave on an island in the Gulf of Mexico, and even more in *Youma* (1890), on the theme of a slave-girl's devotion – till death – to the girl whose 'mammy' she is, and whom she has promised never to desert. Hearn never showed any inclination, despite the optimism of his journalism, to harness his creative imagination to the purpose of analysing modern society. He knew that had he done so he would have taken a view too gloomy for the comfort of his social conscience.

His case is one of simple escapism. That of **Henry Adams** (1838–1918), great-grandson of the second President of the USA and grandson of the sixth, is more complicated. The

two novels he wrote, *Democracy* (1880) and *Esther* (1884) – the first anonymous, the second pseudonymous – are not important as literature; but Adams as a thinker is. He was the first great American pessimist. Where his illustrious family had been public servants, he took refuge in letters. Had he, however, sought to express himself creatively rather than philosophically he would perhaps have discovered an objective correlative for the personal problems of his marriage (1872), which ended in 1885 with the suicide of his wife. But this period of his life (with the seven years following it) is missed out of his remarkable autobiography, *The Education of Henry Adams* (privately issued 1907; published 1918). Adams was a distinguished historian, and in writing his huge *History of the United States during the Administrations of Jefferson and Madison* (1889–91) he had seen something that might have looked like evolution at work; his argument here was that men cannot change the course of history. He wrote, it must be remembered, as a member of a family who had actually ‘made’ history. . . . So he had a superior, or a stronger – less journalistic – sense of evolution than Hearn (q.v.). But, like Hearn, he sought to escape: in restless travel to Mexico, Japan, Europe. In *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres* (privately issued 1904; published 1913) the religiously sceptic Adams postulated a unified medieval universe, the centre of which was the Virgin. This was perhaps more fictional, if unwittingly, than either of his novels: thirteenth-century stability is to a large extent a myth in the minds of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Catholic apologists. We find the same error in a cruder form in *Belloc* (q.v.). He showed the world of 1150–1250 as in equilibrium, ‘pre-evolutionary’, centripetal. In the *Education* he shows the modern ‘multiverse’ as accelerating towards disaster, centrifugal, spinning towards what in a letter he called ‘an ultimate, colossal, cosmic collapse . . . science is to wreck us . . . our power over energy has now reached a point where it must sensibly affect the old adjustment. . . .’ He used the Second Law of Thermodynamics to show the individual, the victim, as so to say being whirled (by the symbol of the Dynamo, opposed to the Virgin of the earlier book), run down and dissipated into a nothingness: into entropy, disorder. Here and in the posthumous *The Degradation of the Democratic Dogma* (1919) – which was edited by his brother, the historian Brooks Adams (1848–1927), who shared his gloomy view of history – Adams rationalized his theory into an exact prophecy, with dates. This prophecy was wrong – the date of final dissolution was doubtless made early in order to fall into Adams’ own lifespan – but few intelligent men reading Adams fifty years after his death are likely to find his apprehensions entirely unjustified. He published his two most important books after the first heyday of American naturalism was over; he had no influence on it. But his thinking in these books – and even more so in his *Letters* (1930; 1947), where he is at his most fascinating and vigorous – is more representative than merely influential. Of course he has nothing in him of the material or cultural optimism that was then one of the characteristics of America, nothing of the pure joy in becoming and feeling pure American, un-English, that distinguishes, say, William Carlos Williams (q.v.). But his work is a response to the same sort of mental crisis that Hofmannsthal describes in his *Chandos* letter (q.v.). Not being a poet, Adams does not see the problem in terms of language. Basically he fears for the integrity of his human, and therefore the human, personality in the face of scientific advance. The proto-fascist and futurist Marinetti (q.v.) hailed the new technology. Adams shuddered before it, his sardonic mind casting fearfully back for a static and stable paradise, for ‘some great generalization which would finish one’s clamour to be educated’. ‘Modern politics is, at bottom, a struggle not of men, but of forces’, he wrote. In the new ‘multiverse’ ‘order [is] an accidental relation obnoxious to nature’. Adams, however, was a historian, not a creative writer: all he wanted was to get out, have nothing to do with it: ‘All the historian won was a vehement wish to escape’.

Each man sees his own death differently: he colours his apprehensions of it according to his personal and historical circumstances. Adams, a historian, a scion of mighty history-makers who had more excuse than most for treating the world as his particular oyster, faced by a crazily accelerating, and already over-confident science (the 'score or two of individuals' who controlled 'mechanical power' he described as 'as dumb as their dynamos, absorbed in the economy of power'), coloured his idea of death with zestful meaninglessness. It is instructive to compare his non-creative reaction to the creative one of the first German expressionists (q.v.), with its distorting rapid wobble between ecstatic hope and horror. Adams' importance is that he shared such men's awareness of the time.

**Ambrose Bierce** (1842–c1914), born in Ohio, was as sardonic as Adams – and more creative. But although his best short stories are distinguished, he never wholly fulfilled his genius, preferring for the most part to substitute for the wisdom he could have attained a mordant but too folksy and self-indulgent cynicism. Bierce was a man of principle (he refused the back pay he had earned as a soldier in the Civil War), and a soul genuinely tortured by what Henry Adams (q.v.) called 'the persistently fiendish treatment of man by man'; but in his case journalism, and the pleasure of being literary dictator of the Pacific States (for a quarter of a century until he resigned in 1909), distracted him from literature; it was easier to indulge himself in his vitriolic epigrams – often cheap and gratuitous, and in any case never on the level of his best stories – than to write creatively. The epigrams are in *The Devil's Dictionary* (1911), originally called *The Cynic's Word Book* (1906); the stories are in *Can Such Things Be?* (1893) and, notably, in *In the Midst of Life* (1898), which was originally called *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* (1891). The famous Civil War tales, including 'An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge' and 'The Horseman in the Sky', in which a young Union soldier has to shoot his father, make a valid use of Poe – and remain original, economic, appropriately macabre: they are secure minor classics. But Bierce did not want to use his imagination to grapple with the problem of contemporary America – his cynical journalism was in a sense as much of an 'escape' as Japan was for Hearn (q.v.). He made his final escape when he disappeared into Mexico, in 1911, to join Pancho Villa. He was never heard of again.



The achievement of **Henry James** (1843–1916), born in New York and educated mostly abroad, is so great as hardly to abide all questions of American realism. Son of a formidable, eccentric Swedenborgian father, and younger brother of William James – an important and seminal thinker – Henry offers in one sense a contrast to Howells (q.v.): his achievement is a monument to how literary genius can surmount crippling personal difficulties. For James was fated to be only an observer. His friend Henry Adams (q.v.) complained that he knew of women only from the outside – 'he never had a wife'. But, as Alfred Kazin rejoins, 'because he knew so little, he could speculate endlessly'. His mind was a brilliant and sensitive instrument of speculation. He is certainly one of those whose work transcends its psychological and historical occasions; the only question is to what extent.

James expressed one important theme of his fiction when he passionately expostulated at the unfairness of fate's treatment of Howells' daughter, Winifred, who died young after a long, disabling, mysterious and unrelieved illness: 'To be young and gentle, and do no harm, and pay for it as if it were a crime'. James as an adolescent had felt himself crushed by his father and his clever older brother; he had not gone to the war as his younger brothers had, and never felt himself able to fulfil a masculine role. His

biographer Leon Edel has now revealed, for those who had not detected it from the work, that James' sexual impulses (at least as a middle-aged man) were homosexual, and that he had a bad conscience about it. Whether or not he was ever an active homosexual is an as yet unanswered question. Probably not. Hugh Walpole (q.v.), whom he fell for ('Beloved Little Hugh') and overrated as a writer, is supposed to have offered himself to the master and to have been repudiated with 'Si la vieillesse pouvait!'. These facts throw new light on such works as 'The Turn of the Screw' (printed in *The Two Magics*, 1898), *The Other House* (1896) and *What Maisie Knew* (1897), all written at the height of James' crisis of homosexuality – which coincided with his humiliation in the theatre and with the trials of Oscar Wilde. (About Wilde James was unforgivably and viciously hypocritical.) It was in 'The Turn of the Screw' above all that James (unconsciously) analysed his condition, defensively referring to it as a 'jeu d'esprit', hoping to throw himself and his readers off the scent. James' personal sexual predicament actually affects our interpretation of all his work, from his first novel *Roderick Hudson* right up until his last unfinished one, the posthumous *The Ivory Tower*. For the young novelist not only wanted to get away from America – although not from his Americanness, a different thing – but also from the 'masculine' obligations of love for a woman and the heavy commitments of marriage. The 'horrid even if ... obscure hurt', probably a strained back, he claimed to have suffered while helping to put out a fire at about the time of the outbreak of the Civil War, served him in a number of ways: it linked him with his father, who when a child had lost a leg while fighting a fire; it excused him from joining the army; it enabled him to be passive, feminine; the nature of the 'injury' was supposed to be sexual, but no one could of course ask about it directly – thus giving 'sex' the *frisson* it nearly always has in James' fiction. The hurt was 'obscure' – but mere mention of it none the less drew a kind of attention to it. It reminds us of those 'things' little Miles, in 'The Turn of the Screw', said to those he 'liked', and which were 'Too bad' 'to write home about' . . .

Europe attracted James from the beginning. He felt that America was too crude for his own artistic purposes. His first novel, *Roderick Hudson* (1876), explores his dilemma: Europe is beautiful, sinister, wicked – like Christina Light, who tortures the genius hero into 'horrible' dissipations which all, of course, as always in James, take place off-stage, and which eventually lead to his death. In *The American* (1877), not one of his most convincing novels, he rationalizes his doubts about his inadequacies. Wealthy American Christopher Newman (the name is significant) goes to Paris (where, said James elsewhere at this time, modern French books resembled 'little vases ... into which unclean things had been dropped') and falls in love with an aristocratic girl whose family are most reluctant to approve the match. Christopher finds an ally, however, in her younger brother Count Valentin. He discovers that the mother of the girl he loves is a murderess, but eventually decides not to use the information to gain his objective: he will not use such knowledge for material ends. Thus James launched himself into fully fledged writerhood.

By 1881, at the age of thirty-eight, with *The Portrait of a Lady*, he had become an undisputed master, for all his shortcomings one of the most important of all English-language novelists. It was in the Eighties that James wrote the novels of his so-called 'middle period': the most notable are *The Bostonians* (1886), *The Princess Casamassima* (1886) and *The Tragic Muse* (1890). The novels of the last period – *The Ambassadors* (1903), *The Golden Bowl* (1904) – are more difficult: the sentences are long, the motivations that are examined are ambiguous; the whole approach seems anfractuuous not to say tortuous. And yet many regard *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), with good reason, as James' masterpiece. This is the story of an innocence betrayed and of the terrifying and irrevocable corruption of spirit that this betrayal brings in its wake. Kate Croy persuades her lover, a poor journalist, Morton Densher, said partly to be based on Ford (q.v.), to attach himself

falsely to a rich, dying girl, Milly. He does so, and gets her money. But he cannot take it, and asks Kate to have him without it. Now herself 'infected' by the innocence of Milly, she will not do so because she rightly suspects him of loving the dead girl's memory. In this hideously accurate portrayal of how a man acts in bad faith, of unmelodramatic evil, James the detached observer triumphed – as he did in so many of his short stories (ed. L. Edel, 12 vols., 1962–5).

Right through his fiction, from *Roderick Hudson* onwards, James had maintained a technique for suggesting, without ever detailing, evil. He had not, of course, experienced evil – only his 'evil' homosexual impulses. He was highly professional, as well as emotionally rather innocent, in the way he dealt with this problem. It is one of his strengths that the horrors he hints at are not really, by normal sophisticated standards, particularly horrible at all. The point is that this highly sentimentive (q.v.) writer was not, in calling 'debauchery' 'unclean', simply being reactionary or hypocritical. It was his lack of knowledge that lamed him; but he turned it into a crutch. We do not look, in James, for any kind of enlightenment about or illumination of actual sexual matters: his fiction deals with the innocent or inexperienced preliminaries to them. They lie horribly in wait at the ends of twisting and turning corridors.

In *The Portrait of a Lady* the good and generous Isabel Archer is not experienced enough to realize that the widower Gilbert Osmond – a shallow pseudo-aesthete whose worst failing, however, is his capacity to manipulate others' emotions for his material advantage – wants her fortune. She marries him, and discovers too late that she can do nothing for him – as she had hoped to do for whatever man she might love. Eventually she admits to her former American suitor that she loves him, but nevertheless chooses to return to her husband: to give up her freedom in return for that of his bastard daughter, Pansy, whose interests she will continue to protect. The reader can and does easily fill in the missing sexuality here: Osmond is as self-indulgently and sadistically lustful for Isabel's virginity as for her money; her own disillusion is as much sexual as psychological. If any reader wonders how she could be taken in by so evidently insincere a man, then he need not wonder for long: the reason is sexual. James had the feminine sensitivity and intuition to understand these things: he earned it by the integrity of his self-analysis – for, in one aspect, all novels are either rationalizations or self-analyses. In *The Portrait of a Lady* James is Ralph Touchett, the tubercular (crippled) observer who loves Isabel, and renounces her from the start (because of his condition) but who stolidly looks after her interests. The real tragedy of the book lies in his death: James' touching account of his own death to sexual life. But he also presents himself as Isabel, who initially turns down both a straightforward New Englander and a decent English aristocrat, then falls into the snare of a cosmopolitan – finally choosing, now a natural and detached moralist, to endure him (as James chose to remain in Europe – but he was happier in England than Isabel was with Osmond, for he found there 'an arrangement of things hanging together with a romantic rightness that had the force of a revelation'). James wrote criticism of great subtlety, travel books and a number of interesting but bad plays and adaptations from his novels (*Complete Plays*, ed. L. Edel, 1949). When the First World War broke out James was agonized: 'that to have to take it all now for what the treacherous years were all the while really making for and *meaning* is too tragic for any words'. He became a British citizen, did what war-work his failing health would allow, received the Order of Merit, and died in 1916. James understood that 1914 meant the disintegration of the old order of things, but was too old to contemplate it. He was one of the greatest of the writers of that vanished world. But he has relevance to the literature of today because his fiction is ultimately a commentary, often exquisite, on what it is to be a creator. Most of the important considerations – the relationship between virtue and creativity among them –

are there. James saw with some ruefulness what he could never be; but he never hid from his creative responsibilities. There will always be controversy about the stature of his last three major books – *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Ambassadors*, *The Golden Bowl*. Are they a ‘trilogy’ that embraces a new form, akin to the drama of Racine? Or was the profound self-adjustment (after his failure to capture a big audience or even to avoid ignominy as a dramatist), of which these books are undoubtedly the fruit, achieved at a high cost to the universality of his art? *The Wings of the Dove* is surely exempt; of the other two novels one is less sure. But all the work of James has much more to yield. Supposing he did, in his last period, create a new kind of fiction; he was still not an innovator in the sense of clearing ground for anyone else; but he cannot be ignored because his whole life was in one way an anticipation of the practice of the writers who came after him: he created his own world, understood that he was God in it – and took his responsibilities with the utmost seriousness. He has been denigrated both by Marxist critics and by members of the indigenous ‘Black Mountain’ school (q.v.); there also existed in the Forties and Fifties an over-fanciful image of James that had little relationship to the man or the writer. Close study, new understanding, increase our respect for him.

James’ friend Edith Wharton (1862–1937), although pessimistic in her view of life, was another who rejected the determinism of naturalism (q.v.). She came of a distinguished family and, like James, was introduced to Europe in childhood. Her marriage was unhappy, since Edward Wharton became mentally ill; this helped to drive her into literature. She settled in France in 1907 and five years later divorced her husband. Mrs. Wharton insisted that the duty of a novelist was to discover what the characters, ‘being what they are, would make of the situation’ – but in reality her people are less free than James’. In her world, usually of high society, vulgarity overwhelms fineness; the choice to go against the conventional leads to disaster; opulence corrupts; where James’ women are convincing angels, Mrs. Wharton’s are defeated harpies. Edith Wharton wrote well of a society she knew, but as a whole her fiction lacks tension. The author knew too well from the beginning, one feels, that vulgarity would triumph: her characters do not assert themselves strongly enough to be tragic in their defeats. The short stories (*Best Short Stories of Edith Wharton*, 1958), ironic and satiric, are slight but in this respect more satisfactory. However, there are amongst the novels some notable exceptions; and Mrs. Wharton invariably maintains a high standard. Her observation is impeccable. One compares her to James and inevitably finds her wanting; and yet she is incomparably better than the Nobel-winning Galsworthy (q.v.) was, even at his best. In her best work she partially overcomes her shortcomings, and has something entirely of her own to offer. An account of *Ethan Frome* (1911), which is one of the only two novels (*Summer*, 1917, is the other) Edith Wharton set outside polite society, makes it sound naturalist; but it is no more than bleak. The story is told wonderingly, by a stranger. Ethan Frome barely wrings a living from the barren earth of his Massachusetts farm; his hated wife Zeena (Zenobia) is a whining hypochondriac. Her cousin Mattie comes to live with them, and Ethan and she fall in love. Zeena forces her out; when Ethan is taking her to the station he yields to the impulse to end it all by crashing the sledge in which they are travelling. But the couple are crippled. Zeena is transformed into their devoted nurse, leaving Mattie to become the whining invalid and Ethan to his despair and certain economic failure. This is not absolutely convincing, but the portrait of Zeena – the nagging, loathed wife – the growth of affection between Ethan and Mattie, and the ironic ending are all beautifully done. Her two other major books are both society novels: *The Custom of the Country* (1913) and *The Age of Innocence* (1920). The character of Undine Spragg, the ruthless social climber of the first, has been objected to on the grounds that Mrs. Wharton’s disgust with her type is too great to permit of psychological accuracy. This is not alto-

gether fair. Undine Spragg is a shallow monster driven by ignoble motives; but when critics object that the drama of her marriage to a Frenchman more decent than herself is 'weakened' by this, they are in effect trying to tell novelists what kind of characters to use in order to get their plots right. But life is not as such critics want it to be, and novelists must ignore them. People like Undine Spragg do exist, and *The Custom of the Country* is better than is generally allowed. *The Age of Innocence* is an acid, ironic but touching study of a love whose happiness is destroyed by adherence to a code, and by the kind of people 'who dreaded scandal more than disease, who placed decency above courage'. *Hudson River Bracketed* (1929) is not wholly successful, but is peculiarly subtle and poignant in its portrait of the creative side of its hero, a novelist who discovers that the 'people' he understands best are the ones he has invented. . . . There is something very attractive about Edith Wharton even at her worst – when she is too gloomy or when she is copying Henry James in some of her supernatural tales – for she is always intelligent and humane. Probably her best work has been underestimated and her originality not fully recognized.



'New England transcendentalism' is even less susceptible of exact definition than most such phenomena. But, although it was never a school, it is important, for all subsequent American movements may be seen to stem from it. Essentially it is a first religious step after the repudiation of the Christian doctrine; it can fairly be called a form of rationalistic religion. Its chief figure was Emerson, whose lecture 'The Transcendentalist' came in 1841, when transcendentalism was at its peak. One can most profitably study transcendentalism as it manifested itself in individuals – in Henry David Thoreau, in Emerson himself, in the poet Jones Very – but, while there was never a doctrine, some ideas were held in common. Every transcendentalist is a Platonist, and the inclination towards Oriental religions (exemplified in the later Emerson), 'creedless creeds', is typical. The spirit of transcendentalism was eclectic, individualist, reformist. On the specifically American subject of slavery the transcendentalists were abolitionist, although initially they were more sympathetic than active – but for the honourable reason that they were sceptical of all group action.

In the fiction of Henry James (q.v.) the implications of transcendentalism were realized. Its consistent background was a non-dogmatic – indeed, a being-sought-for – moral system, something as ghostly but as effectual as that of any Platonic realm of perfections. Thus Mrs. Wharton (q.v.), despite her gloom and her apparent belief that men's circumstances are stronger than themselves, is no naturalist: she follows James when she says: 'Every great novel must first of all be based on a profound sense of moral values. . . .' And one does feel her sense of values more strongly than her gloom, which in any case does not arise from an intellectual determinism. That same moral sense lurks behind Howells' fiction, too; but in him there are more gentlemanly prejudices.

The source of naturalism (q.v.) – which only in America produced a crop of major or potentially major novelists – is, as Charles Child Walcutt has pointed out in an essay on Dreiser (q.v.), the 'Divided Stream of . . . transcendentalism'. The transcendentalists, not always unconfusedly, regarded spirit and matter as two aspects of the same thing. But, as Walcutt observes:

The monist stream did not stay One . . . time and experience divided it into poles of optimism and pessimism, freedom and determinism, will and fate, social reformism and mechanistic despair . . . the Nature which was assumed to be a version of a

man's spirit and therefore of his will appeared under scientific analysis as a force which first controlled man's will and presently made it seem that his freedom was an illusion, that there was no such thing as will but only chemicals performing reactions which could (theoretically at least) be predicted.

First, Walcutt continues, Americans believed that the human spirit could be liberated by mastering nature; but their 'devotion to science and fact' led them to the point where the natural law seemed to deny both freedom and spirit. . . .

The atmosphere that produced the powerful movement of American naturalism was well summed up by Henry Adams in 1894 when he wrote '... if anything is radically wrong it must grow worse. . . . If we are diseased, so is all the world. . . . Europe is rather more in the dark than we are. . . .'

But there is more in a major novelist than a philosophy or, more usually, a pseudo-philosophy. As Nietzsche (q.v.) once said, talking about realists: 'What does one see, and paint, or write? In the last analysis, what one *wishes* to see, and what one *can* see'. And so, grateful as we are to determinism and gloom for sometimes inspiring such as Dreiser, we do not go to him for his thinking (God forbid). As always, the truly gifted went altogether beyond dogmatism, to produce something certain and knowable. But let us first look at the minor novelists who anticipated or participated in naturalism.

**Hamlin Garland** (1860–1940) is more interesting as a pioneer than as a novelist. Harold Frederic (1856–98), a similar pioneer, produced in *Seth's Brother's Wife* (1887) and *The Damnation of Theron Ware* (1896) novels psychologically far in advance of anything of Garland's; but the latter does have his importance. An autodidact, Garland was born in Wisconsin. As a young man he sweated on the land: he knew the farmers he wrote about, and the conditions under which they worked. He was influenced by Howells (q.v.), and even more by the economist Henry George (1839–97). George, a lucid and fervent writer, was highly influential. Imbued with the Pelagianism that still characterizes most Americans, he devised an economic scheme by which he believed social justice might be ensured: a 'single tax' on land. By means of this, he believed, the community would recover what it had lost in rents. George's effect on economic thought probably amounted to little more than the stimulation of more lucid theories of rent (as an economist, it is said, he was 'a little more than a child'), but his passion for justice and the style of his thinking were and to some extent still are influential (to the dismay of some economists). George's theories lie behind Garland's early short stories, collected in *Prairie Folks* (1893) and *Wayside Courtships* (1897): these villainize landlords and mortgage-holders rather programmatically, in a manner of which Marx would have disapproved. In the mid-Nineties Garland put forward a theory of literature that he called 'veritism'. This was a meliorist extension of realism. It was naturalist only in that in proposing a literature that would change social conditions it assumed that those conditions determined men's lives. Garland's best work is a short novel called *A Little Norsk* (1892), about a Dakota farm-girl's hard lot; next best is the longer *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* (1895), the story of another farm-girl – but this one studies at the University of Wisconsin and succeeds in becoming a writer in Chicago. Garland projected himself into his heroine, but then got interested in her for her own sake. The result is a convincing realist novel. Garland's most serious work was not popular, and before the turn of the century he began to write romances of the far West; after this he turned into a dull memoirist and, ultimately, weak-minded devotee of psychical phenomena.

**Robert Herrick** (1868–1938) was not a naturalist, but like Garland he anticipated and influenced the mood by his critical and reformist attitude. A graduate of Harvard, he was a professor of English at the University of Chicago. An older professor, writing of him in

1909, could allude to him as 'something of a pessimist, but not unwholesome'. Herrick partly made up for his lack of power and psychological penetration by his honesty. He was perhaps temperamentally a determinist, but frustrated by guilt about the consequences of such an attitude. The scientist of his first novella, 'The Man Who Wins' (1897), believes in the freedom of the will – but his very circumstances seem to deny it. Herrick did not resolve his problem, but turned to the (sometimes acute) analysis of the corruptions and strains in industrial society. In his best novels he succeeded in his aim of dealing with social problems 'less in an argumentative ... manner than as crises in human lives'. *The Web of Life* (1900), his most psychologically ambitious book, indicates the direction he might have liked to follow. Herrick was obsessed with the figure of the doctor, the healer (an inferior 1911 novel is called *The Healer*), and this early book is about one who saves the life of an alcoholic by an operation in which, however, he injures the brain. He falls in love with the man's wife; she collapses under the strain and kills herself. This was melodramatic and, except in parts, unconvincing: Herrick was wise to turn to the more social theme of *The Common Lot* (1904), his best novel, which traces the moral degradation of a young Chicago architect in his dealings with crooked builders, which finally lead to a fire and a number of deaths. His moral 'regeneration' by his wife is tacked on as a gesture. Herrick later became more ponderous, his characters less interesting. His greatest success, the sentimental novella *The Master of the Inn* (1908), is now dated and unreadable.

The prolific **Upton Sinclair** (1878–1969) was from any kind of 'Jamesian' point of view never more than a simplistic romancer, but he cannot quite be ignored – he is, as one critic has said, 'an event in nature'. *The Jungle* (1906) displays real power and concern, and is possibly the most sheerly vivid exposé in American literature of humanly intolerable economic conditions. It tells of the exploitation of an immigrant Lithuanian family in the meat-packing industry. The message is socialist, but what was heeded was the revelation of the filthy conditions in which meat was packed in Chicago – Sinclair had himself investigated the situation. The Federal Pure Food and Drug Act was hastened through, with the assistance of Theodore Roosevelt; but the lot of the workers was not improved for many years. Sinclair was humourless, a crank and an idealist – but of a personal nobility enough to make most humorous and sensible realists feel at least a pang of shame. He wrote well over one hundred books. He remained a socialist all his life, but was one of the first to rumble the nature of the Soviet regime. After *The Jungle* his best known novels are the 'Lanny Budd' series, beginning with *World's End* (1940): these feature Lanny Budd, the bastard son of a munitions king who is, in his grandiosely well-intentioned way, a kind of Yankee Jules Romains (q.v.) in that writer's unfortunate self-appointed capacity of world's chief troubleshooter. Lanny knows everyone, including the top men, and they take note of him. Sinclair, who sunk his money into or took part in several Utopian projects, including Helicon Hall (burnt down), and a single-tax colony, was at heart a big, dear romantic booby. But he was not middlebrow: he did not tell his audience anything at all they wanted to hear. And although, like Henry George (q.v.), he believed in the innate goodness of man, he was a true naturalist at least in the sense that he was able to bring to the notice of a reluctant public the evils they lived amongst.

**Stephen Crane** (1871–1900) was almost forgotten until some quarter of a century after his death from tuberculosis. Then the novelist, pleasantly ironic short-story writer and critic **Thomas Beer** (1889–1940) – famous for his later study of the Nineties, which he christened *The Mauve Decade* (1926) – wrote his *Stephen Crane* (1923), which was one of the initial steps in the rehabilitation of a major writer. (Beer himself combined the economy of Lytton Strachey (q.v.) with the sardonic style of Henry Adams (q.v.) and was a notable biographer; unfortunately he later came to over-sound the sardonic note, and some of

*The Mauve Decade* reads like self-parody.) Since Beer's book and the issue of his *Collected Works* in twelve volumes in 1926 Crane has, and without doubt properly, attained the status of a classic. The fourteenth son of a Methodist preacher and a religiously zealous, well-educated mother, Crane was a thorough rebel by the time he came of age. Part of the secret of his achievement lies in the absoluteness of his rejection of the values of his age – which went with an intelligent curiosity, a sense of humour, and a natural compassion in acute competition with a bitter and sardonic nihilism. Even when Crane seems to throw the whole of himself into what he is describing, a part of him is usually detached and amused. His style was devastatingly new and original.

Crane starved, worked as a freelance journalist, and then, in 1893, published his first book, under the name of 'Johnston Smith', at his own expense. *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* was reprinted, in a slightly abridged form, in 1896. At the time of its first publication only Garland and Howells (qq.v.) noticed it. *Maggie*, whatever its faults, is a pretty remarkable effort for a twenty-two-year-old: what it lacks in maturity it more than makes up for in attack, candour and confidence. Critics have suggested several sources of this stark tale of a pretty girl forced by the brutal squalor of her home, and then by seduction and desertion, into prostitution and suicide: '*Madame Bovary* recast in Bowery style', the novels of Zola (q.v.), or a sermon of De Witt Talmage which visualizes the suicide of a prostitute called Maggie. . . . It is not certain how much Crane had then read. But the book's tone is Crane's and no one else's. It is, as a critic said, 'violent and absurd like a primitive film' – but not, as the same critic incautiously adds, 'dated'. The 'primitive film' effect is an impressionism that anticipates the innovatory pointillism of *The Red Badge of Courage*. The scenes in which Maggie's parents quarrel are perhaps absurd; but they are also vivid and powerful – one feels how the hopelessly pretty, weak girl was deafened by them. (An old woman asks Maggie, amid shrieks, 'Is yer fader beatin' yer mudder, or yer mudder beatin' yer fader?') Regardless of whether naturalism is a 'true' philosophy or not, Crane gave an unforgettable account of one poor creature whose life was quickly snuffed out by her environment. And he strengthened his novel by bringing to it the moral indignation of his preacher father, but not the moral judgement. Its abundant irony is apparent only to the sensitive, humane reader. It remains as truthful a picture of Bowery life as could at that time have been achieved. It has the authority of imagination and a painterly exactitude that reminds one of the fine New York slum paintings of George Bellows and the 'Ashcan' group of painters whom he joined.

Encouraged by Howells and Garland, although ignored by almost everyone else, Crane continued to write. In his laconic, debunking poetry, published in *The Black Riders* (1895), *War is Kind* (1899) and collected in 1930 and again, in a variorum edition, by J. Katz (1966), Crane created a tough, rhythmical free verse: it was well fitted to accommodate what John Berryman (q.v.) has called his 'sincerity . . . bluntness . . . enigmatic character . . . barbarity'. It is subtler than the directness of its manner makes it seem, and in it Crane has absolutely no truck with respectability – or anything that seems to him to be respectable. This poetry, influenced as much by the verbal compression of Emily Dickinson as by the cynicism of Bierce (q.v.), has not perhaps had its full due in spite of the recognition now accorded to Crane. However, he did not wholly succeed in finding his own poetic voice, which might well have combined his parabolic with his symbolist, 'Baudelairian' manner, when this had been purged of its immature neo-romantic tendencies. Crane's poetry is important, though, because in it he is investigating the meaning of his deepest and most mysterious impulses.

Crane subscribed to Garland's 'veritism', but had had no personal experience of war, the subject of *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895). This is an extraordinary demonstration of the complex nature of fiction: it may be 'realism', it may even be 'naturalism' in so far as

it presents men helpless in the grip of events – but the ‘reality’ it embraces is evidently wider than that of mere reportage. As one of Crane’s leading critics, R.W. Stallman, has pointed out, it ‘is a symbolic construct’. And because it succeeds so triumphantly on the realistic level, it is also about many other things: the fearful plunge of men into maturity and responsibility, into sexuality, into the raw, chaotic unknown. Henry Fleming is not named until half-way through the book. A farm-boy, he swaggers to himself, is frightened, is reassured, is caught up in battle and runs, gains his ‘red badge’ by an accident, returns and becomes a demon of aggressive energy. But it is all for nothing: his regiment takes up its former position. If he has become a ‘man’ (as he tries to believe) then what, asks the ironic structure of the book, is a man? In a short sequel, ‘The Veteran’, Henry really does become a ‘man’ when he goes into a burning barn to rescue two horses; but after that conversion he is a dead man. Another interesting thing about Henry Fleming and some of Crane’s other characters is that they have nothing dishonestly to offer outside his own pages. As Berryman points out, they are not ‘types’, but they are not ‘round’ characters either: they move significantly only in their context, of Crane’s impressionistic imagination. This not only anticipates but also disposes of all the philosophical claptrap surrounding the *nouveau roman* (q.v.). He does not tell us meaninglessly that the sun shone red. He puts it honestly into the text that is his own picture, his invention of a battle: ‘The red sun was pasted in the sky like a wafer’.

Crane’s novel ‘The Third Violet’ (1897), on bohemian life, is more conventional than *George’s Mother* (1896), a competent tale of a working-class mother whose son is the opposite of what she fondly and pathetically imagines he is. Besides novels, poetry, unfinished plays and fiction, and a mass of journalism, Crane left behind him a number of short stories as classic as *The Red Badge of Courage*. The most famous of these are ‘The Open Boat’, based on Crane’s experiences when, sent as correspondent to cover an expedition, he was shipwrecked off Cuba, and ‘The Blue Hotel’, a wickedly knowing tale about a Swede who creates the death-trap, the hostility of tough Nebraskans, that he most fears.

Crane drove himself ever more frenetically towards an early death. He took jobs covering the Spanish-American and the Graeco-Turkish wars, got into debt, desperately and vainly tried to write himself out of it. His last years were shared in England in a dilapidated manor house at Brede, Kent, with Cora Taylor, divorcee, prostitute and madame. There he made close friends of H.G. Wells, Ford Madox Ford and Joseph Conrad (qq.v.), and enjoyed as much friendship and understanding as any young writer has had. But he wore himself out entertaining on a regal scale, projecting – and writing. It was characteristic that he should have taken no heed of a serious warning (a lung haemorrhage) six months before he died. His self-destructiveness remains enigmatic, but one senses an enormous secret despair behind the sardonic and even gay phthisic energy. We can suspect that as his Henry Fleming turned after the battle to ‘tranquil skies’ with ‘a lover’s thirst’, so he turned to death. Certainly Hemingway (q.v.) was right in saying that modern American literature begins with *Huckleberry Finn*; but rivers do not come from one spring, and it is as true to say that it flows from Crane’s fiction. This may become increasingly apparent. It is sometimes objected that Crane’s fiction and ‘perverse’ poetry ultimately function only ‘as a fresh symbol of the universe’s indifference to human needs’ (Alfred Kazin). Crane did feel that. But there is something else locked away in that blandly autonomous prose, a creative intelligence like a great bird of prey, anticipating American writing not yet seen.

Chicago, to become the centre of the new literature, was an appropriate birthplace for **Frank Norris** (1870–1902), who shared the given names of ‘Benjamin Franklin’, but little else, with Wedekind (q.v.). Norris did not have Crane’s genius or sense of style, but he left

some powerful fiction, and usefully demonstrates the limitations of such terms as naturalism when they are allowed to apply to anything beyond conscious method: we cannot heed Nietzsche's warning too much; 'What does one see, and paint, or write? ... what one *wishes* to see, and what one *can* see'. Norris was a romantic who studied art in Paris at seventeen, and while there became hooked on medieval chivalry (or what passed for it) rather than realist or naturalist literature. Later, however, at Harvard, he chose the naturalist method as he had observed it in the novels of Zola (q.v.) in order to have a literary principle, and thus to get his fiction written. He carried out journalistic assignments, including one in Cuba, married, and became well known as a novelist before his death. Norris wrote his best novel, *Vandover and the Brute* (1914), while at Harvard during 1894 and 1895; the manuscript was believed lost for a time, in the San Francisco earthquake; it was not published until twelve years after his early death of peritonitis. *McTeague*, written at about the same time, was published in 1899, after the issue of the later and inferior *Moran of the Lady Letty* (1898). Norris' reputation rests on *Vandover*, *McTeague*, and the first novel of a planned but uncompleted trilogy on the production and distribution of wheat: *The Octopus* (1901); *The Pit* (1903), the second, is inferior. His first published work, a long phoney-medieval poem in three cantos called *Tvernelle: A Tale of Feudal France* (1892), is of no literary value but is useful as an indication of the romanticism that he never wholly shed.

Norris' importance has been acknowledged, but his achievement has been underrated because he has been judged (by critics more interested in movements than individual writers) as a naturalist and therefore by the standards of realism. Norris was, however, like Crane, a symbolist, and his three best books are all symbolic novels; but unlike Crane, he had no inkling of the fact, and when he announced, 'By God! I told them the truth', he equated the telling of truth with the simple act of holding a mirror up to the unpleasanter facts of nature. He had been very worried by the consequences of his (apparently ordinary) sexual excesses, and suffered from some measure of the gentility then endemic in America. The simple fact of sex existing at all haunts his fiction as a terrifying background grossness. *McTeague* is about a huge and physically gross dentist who is driven to bestiality, and the murder of his whining, miserly wife Trina, because of the circumstances created when his jealous friend betrays him to the authorities for practising illegally. *McTeague* is indebted to Zola, and even to actual incidents in his novels, and it is plainly intended as a naturalist novel, with simple symbols (such as the huge, gilded tooth that Trina gives McTeague for his sign: 'tremendous, overpowering ... shining dimly out ... with some mysterious light ...', or his canary). *McTeague* is usually described by critics as 'stupid and brutal', and as thoroughly deserving of his fate; and possibly Norris himself consciously thought this. Actually, however, he is initially a very sympathetic character, not in the least brutal except when aroused – as when a friend bites his ear. His lapse in 'grossly' kissing Trina while she is anaesthetized is not too serious, since he goes no further – and in any case the episode too obviously arises from Norris' own anxiety about sexual desire originating in a menacing beasthood (which he was simultaneously trying to resolve in *Vandover*). In *McTeague* each incident and object, and not just that gilded tooth, has symbolic force. The whole does not quite hang together, but the clumsy and deliberate style (like that 'of a great wet dog', John Berryman suggests) is more appropriate than is at first apparent. *McTeague*'s degeneration – after his friend has denounced him – is convincing; but is it 'realistic'? Not more than the detail of his carrying his little singing canary about with him under impossible circumstances, or more than the habit he gets into of biting his wife's fingers (which have to be amputated) to punish her.

*The Octopus* is a more truly realistic novel. The 'octopus' of the title is the railroad,

which threatens California wheat-ranchers. The description of the battle between the farmers and the railway men is justly famous, and the whole novel – although like all of Norris' fiction it has grave faults, one of the chief of which is unconvincing and stilted dialogue – deserves its reputation. *Vandover*, however, remains his masterpiece. It deals with the descent into madness, despair and penury of a decent and well-bred man. It quite transcends its origins: Norris' fear of syphilis, which masked his even profounder terror that sexual indulgence might drive him into a mysterious insanity; and a programmatically naturalist desire to show a man at the mercy of his 'bad' heredity. This is not a moral tale, as is sometimes alleged, because Vandover's fate is ironically contrasted with the good fortune of his vulgar friend Geary, a dishonest man who sows as many wild oats as Vandover, but merely prospers. Vandover's illness is not venereal, as has been suggested, but mental: once a promising painter, he sinks into a fatal decline, ending up by prowling naked and barking like a dog, earning his living by cleaning up filth. His decent friend Haight, however, does get syphilis – apparently from a mere kiss and the accidental slippage of a court plaster. Out of a neurotic anxiety and a fairly crude programme Norris produced a satisfying comment on the nature of both sexuality and creativity. It has been objected that he was inconsistent, putting the blame for Vandover's madness variously on himself, an indifferent universe, and society. ... But Norris' creative bewilderment is honest; the pert critical objection is sterile. The book has a power and cohesiveness that cause us to take it on trust. Norris did more than enough to ensure survival.

If **Theodore Dreiser** (1871–1945), the Indiana-born son of a crippled and intermittently employed mill superintendent, had sought fame as a thinker he would have been lucky to get as far as the middle pages of a local newspaper. His fiction, the best of which is not far below the best of the century, is related to his ideas (if we care so to dignify them); but it is fatal to an understanding of the fiction to try to interpret it in terms of the ideas. Most people with such sets of notions as Dreiser possessed remain comparatively inarticulate cranks, or, at best, write books whose appeal is strictly limited to the semi-educated. But Dreiser's fiction is what his ideas were really about. And although his determinism is philosophically shabby and his 'science' a vulgarized jargon and travesty, H.L. Mencken (q.v.) was entirely justified in his remark that 'Dreiser can feel, and, feeling, he can move. The others are very skilful with words'. And when a critic as intelligent as Lionel Trilling, a cruel and treacherous academic rationalist and heartless intellectual incensed by such reactions as Mencken's, tried to demonstrate that Dreiser was not good and wrote poorly (clumsily and not like a professor) because he thought poorly (not like an ambitious rationalist professor), instead of damaging Dreiser's status (who, admiring him, does not know that his style and thinking are not models for emulation?) he most painfully and needlessly exposed his own shortcomings. Dreiser is an exception that tests almost every known rule.

Dreiser was an emotional, not an intellectual man. We have to treat his ideas as simplistic rationalization of his feelings; in his fiction they become transformed. Since his parents were poor, Dreiser was all his life profoundly moved by poverty. Few if any serious modern writers actually believe in capitalism as a system, although many do believe that liberalized forms of it may be the least of a number of evils; Dreiser, however, loathed it, and at the end of his life he joined the communist party, convinced that a Marxist revolution would provide the only just solution. On the other hand Dreiser, himself a compulsive womanizer, was obsessed by capitalist tycoons and crooks, and by the compulsive sexuality they frequently display. The character of Frank Cowperwood, the central character in the trilogy comprising *The Financier* (1912), *The Titan* (1914) and the posthumous *The Stoic* (1947), is partially based on the swindler and transport

magnate Charles Yerkes. (Dreiser himself, after a year at Indiana University and some years working on newspapers, attained huge success before he became a famous writer: although his first novel failed in 1900, he went on to become editor of the women's magazine *The Delineator* at the then unprecedented salary of \$25,000.) Brought up as a strict Catholic, he came to hate religion and to profess to see the workings of the mind as 'chemisms', mere predetermined chemical reactions. But he remained as interested in religion as in socialism and communism; his last novel – most of *The Stoic* was written many years before his death – *The Bulwark* (1946), some of which was written at the end of his life, has for its hero Solon Barnes, who is sympathetically portrayed as a Quaker and a seeker after religious truth. As for 'chemisms': he could never fully make up his mind about free will (what novelist really can if he tries?), and one of the strengths of his fiction is its ambiguity on this point (for all the unnecessary pseudo-philosophical asides). As Dreiser drifted into communism, he also drifted into a sympathy with the transcendentalism of Thoreau, and with Hinduism. But it is the novels that are important – and Trilling's virulent hatred of them is instructive.

In terms of thought all this is of small interest. But when Dreiser came to write his fiction he stopped what he believed was thinking, his imagination started to work, and he dramatized the conflict within himself. Those asides that disfigure even the finest of his novels are irrelevant to them. Critics say that Dreiser in *An American Tragedy* 'makes society responsible' for the tragedy of Clyde Griffiths' execution. That is not so. Dreiser does not know. But certainly this is not the 'message' of his massive and poignant novel. He shows us Clyde's own pitiful moral weakness, the terrible unwitting callousness with which he plans Roberta's death. Beside this he shows us the hypocritical and equally callous indifference of society, concerned with procedures and not at all with understanding or even guilt. Dreiser's book is important in that it gives us the actual grain of, the sense of being of, a specific human being going towards extinction; it warns that 'life' is frightening because it is 'like that'; but it offers – whatever Dreiser himself may say when he abandons his proper business of rendering Clyde and his story – no easy junketing of responsibility onto society. Clyde is forced to leave Kansas and the Green-Davidson by chance (the running down of a child, for which he is not responsible); thus he meets his uncle, his good fortune – and his end. Here Dreiser offers no facile comment as to whether there is free will. There is nothing essential to the novel that demonstrates choice as an illusion – except in that universal and bitter sense which the retrospective view confers. And the book has much more subtlety than is usually allowed – for example, in its descriptions of Clyde's eyes.

*Sister Carrie* (1900) was accepted for Doubleday by Frank Norris (q.v.), but Doubleday himself – influenced by his wife, who was horrified because in it 'sin' is not 'punished' (it is the duty of society to keep this dark, lest the underprivileged should try it) – 'privished' it: he kept to his contract, printed and bound one thousand copies – but did not push it at all hard. That it was not put on sale at all is a myth, doubtless propagated by Dreiser himself. So Dreiser had to wait until 1911 and the publication of *Jennie Gerhardt* for recognition. After the first two of the 'Trilogy of Desire' (on Cowperwood) came *The Genius* (1915). *An American Tragedy*, which was occasioned by the Chester Gillette-Grace Brown case (though it is not based on it), was published in 1925. Apart from these novels and the final posthumous two, Dreiser wrote many short stories, travel and political books, essays and (atrocious) verse.

The view (later modified) of the influential biographical critic Van Wyck Brooks (1886–1963) that American literature was impoverished by puritan dualism (isolated idealism starved by practical materialism) was over-simplified, especially since it wrote off Mark Twain and Henry James (qq.v) as failures; nor was it a new idea; but it had truth in

it. Dreiser helped American literature out of the 'genteel tradition'; again, although critics do not enjoy admitting it, he offered something that Henry James could not offer. Where Dreiser is massive is in the illusions he gives of lives as they are lived, of people as they seem: Clyde weakly appealing in his good looks and ambitiousness (right from when the 'captain' at the Green-Davidson engages him as bellboy), Carrie Meeber and Jennie Gerhardt innocent – although in different ways – of the nature of the lusts they arouse in men. . . . Dreiser – notwithstanding the philosophies in which he was interested, ranging from Herbert Spencer to Elmer Gates' Laboratory of Psychology and Psychurgy – can convey the texture of life itself as few other novelists can. It is the kind of 'realism' for which there will always be a place. To reject what Dreiser has to offer may well be an insult to the imagination.

Dreiser's best novels are *Sister Carrie* and *An American Tragedy*, followed by *Jennie Gerhardt* – here the heroine, whom some critics still describe as 'sinful', is morally superior to the other characters, whereas Carrie was morally neutral – and *The Financier*. Then, a long way back, come the last two of the Cowperwood trilogy. Here there are too many authorial asides – we hear too often the voice of Elmer Gates of the Laboratory of Psychurgy – and Dreiser's confusion over Cowperwood loses dramatic power. *The Genius* (1915), whose chief character Eugene Witla is a self-portrait – with some added details drawn from a painter and an art-editor Dreiser knew – was banned and then drastically rewritten. It is the odd one out of Dreiser's books. Here Dreiser tried to resolve his sexual difficulties, but pseudo-intellectual scruples interfered; there are far too many irrelevant intrusions. However, some sections of the novel – such as that describing Witla's decision, after a breakdown, to give up painting and become a manual worker – are extremely good. *The Bulwark* is interesting, but lacks creative steam.

A word about the so famously bad style and the gauche dialogue. Too much is made of this. Dreiser was not a sophisticated writer; a sophisticated or elegant style would not have suited him. His style is admirable – for its purposes. That it is rebarbative, 'as lacerating to the sensibility as the continuous grinding of pneumatic drills' (Walter Allen), is neither here nor there: so is the life and death of Clyde Griffiths, so is the fact that only a little 'ordinary' ruthlessness on his part would have brought him success, so is the transformation of the matter of his guilt or innocence into a political issue, so is the massive and never withdrawn pity. To lament that Dreiser's style was not 'better' is to miss the whole point of what Dreiser was. It is not of course sensible to praise Dreiser at the expense of a very different writer, Henry James. It is less sensible to condemn him, as Lionel Trilling tried to do, because he was not James (or, more precisely, James-as-seen-by-Trilling). Trilling sneers at the concept of Dreiser's 'great brooding pity' and attacks him for the 'failure of his mind and heart'. It is an interesting and curiously contorted bitterness in a critic that can miss Dreiser's achievement in *An American Tragedy*. What has gone wrong here? It is something more fundamental than Dreiser's doubtless hideously non-professorial notions of culture. . . . In a comment on *An American Tragedy* Irving Howe shrewdly quotes George Santayana (q.v.) on one kind of religious perception, that 'power of which we profess to know nothing further', and through which we feel 'the force, the friendliness, the hostility, the unfathomableness of the world'. As Howe says, this power 'flows, in . . . feverish vibration, through *An American Tragedy*'. Whoever says Dreiser's heart fails has little heart himself.

Jack London (1876–1916), bastard son of a wandering Irish astrologer whom he never saw, is wrongly regarded in Russia as a great writer. He is, however, a remarkable one, with a gift for storytelling unsurpassed in his time. Before he found fame and a huge public in the early years of the century, Jack London (he adopted his mother's husband's surname) had roughed it: had drunk heavily, whored, been to jail, poached oysters,

slaved in a canning factory, prospected for gold, been a tramp, gone sealing. . . . He is another writer whose achievement need not be discussed in terms of his crude attempts to systematize his reading; but he has neither the compassion nor the weight of Dreiser. London achieved enormous success, wrote fifty books in sixteen years, married twice – and finally killed himself (half-unpremeditatedly) with an overdose of morphine when ill health (uraemia), financial worry and legal troubles exerted too great a pressure upon him.

The main influences on London, apart from the fact of his bastardy, which he suppressed and which drove him to seek fame, fortune and respectability, were the writings of Kipling (q.v.) and Stevenson, then in the ascendant in America, and the ideas of Marx, Darwin (through his popularizer Haeckel) and Nietzsche (q.v.). There is usually something worthwhile in all London's fiction, if only narrative and descriptive vigour. But as he grew older he tended to dissipate his gifts in his increasingly frenetic quest for security. His best books are: *The Call of the Wild* (1903), which dealt with his own problem (compare Norris) of wildness by giving an account of a dog that returns to its ancestors, the wolves; *The Game* (1905), a boxing tale (perhaps only for those who like and have a knowledge of its subject); *The Iron Heel* (1907), which prophesied a 300-year period of fascism, followed by socialism; *Martin Eden* (1909), an autobiographical novel in which London made the more personal prophecy of his suicide seven years later; and *The Star Rover* (1915), interconnected short stories about a convict who learns to transfer himself to another body. London was acutely aware of the conflict between instinct and reason, retrogression to primitivism, progress to utopia; in his inferior fiction he too crudely advances either socialism or his misunderstanding of Nietzsche. It was in *The Call of the Wild* that he discovered his most satisfactory objective correlative. He wrote beautifully about animals, with whom he had a sympathy that extended beyond his obsessions with brutality and strength. London is not only still readable, but still worth reading (a different matter).

**Sherwood Anderson** (1876–1941), born in Camden, Ohio, still does not always get his due, even in America. To some extent this is understandable. At his death Lionel Trilling (once again) struck; he reprinted his vicious and patronizing obituary piece, with added material, in his widely-circulated collection of essays *The Liberal Imagination* (1950). This helped to put Anderson out of fashion. Furthermore, the best writing of his last twenty years (written off too confidently by the ignorant Trilling as a time of absolute and 'poignant' failure), the autobiographical material, was unavailable. Paul Rosenfeld's *Sherwood Anderson's Memoirs* (1942), however good its editor's intentions, was bibliographically a disgrace, consisting largely of rewritten material. Not until 1970 did *Sherwood Anderson's Memoirs: A Critical Edition*, impeccably edited by Ray Lewis White, appear. The best writing in this has the kind of impact of the stories of Anderson's undoubted and acknowledged masterpiece, *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919).

Anderson's moment of truth at the age of thirty-six is a legend. He was sitting in his paint factory in Elyria, Ohio, dictating to his secretary in the winter of 1912, when he suddenly walked out. He turned up in a Cleveland hospital four days later, with 'nervous collapse'. This myth that Anderson himself established about his escape from soulless commercialism to creative freedom contained an element of truth. For he did eventually reject the non-values of his existence as an advertising copywriter and salesman of paint and, previously, other merchandise. But he had been struggling for some years with writing before he made the famous break; and he did not give up writing advertising copy until 1923 – as he tells us in the memoirs he wrote in the Thirties, when his fame had passed. Superficially the businessman Anderson was not very different from his neighbours: public churchgoer and private out-of-town brothel-patronizer, country club

member, and so on. There are similar men in almost every small town in America, and some of them even 'walk out'. But Anderson differed from them because, in the privacy of an attic, out of the way of his university-educated wife who was always informing him of his inability to become the kind of man she envisaged as a writer, he indulged himself in what at first seemed like fantasies but later turned out to be the imaginative realities of a born writer. Although the actual moment of walking out came to symbolize for him his dramatic escape from the crass materialism of America, the process really took a number of years. The walking out was the result of a real hysterical breakdown, occasioned by domestic tension and financial anxiety; these elements were played down, and led first to Anderson's being lionized as a great antiphilistine and enemy of Babbitry (q.v.), but later to his being attacked and subsequently neglected as a crude apostle of instinct. And yet in 1956 William Faulkner (q.v.) affirmed that Anderson was 'the father of my generation of American writers and the tradition of American writing which our successors will carry on', and he asked for 'a proper evaluation'.

Six of Anderson's seven novels amount to little more than a distraction from his real achievement, which lies in his short stories and in the section of autobiography collected together by Ray Lewis White. Parts of the first, *Windy McPherson's Son* (1916), are good, and in all of them, even the disastrous *Dark Laughter* (1925), there are fine passages. The best, and worth revival, is *Poor White* (1920), a successful projection of the author into Hugh McVey, a 'poor white' telegraph operator who becomes successful when he invents a corncutter. He awakens from his mathematical dreams only when Bidwell, Ohio, has been turned into a strife-torn industrial hell. *Poor White* has the faults of too glaring symbolism, but the grotesque and then distorted character of Hugh, and much of the detail of Bidwell's transformation into a factory town, are described with the power and subtlety of *Winesburg, Ohio*.

But Anderson was superior in shorter forms: the pressure put upon him to write long fiction was not good for his work. He was a lyrical and truly naïve (q.v.) writer; his outbursts against criticism, some of it sensible criticism, did not help readers to understand him or critics to follow him. Hemingway (q.v.), an inferior writer, pillaged him and then tried to parody him in his *Torrents of Spring*. After a difficult period in the Twenties, Anderson met his fourth wife, with whom he was happy, and retired from the literary scene to edit two Virginia newspapers, one democratic and the other republican. It was in this period that he did much of the autobiographical writing that provides a full answer to Trilling's charge that 'what exasperates us is his stubborn, satisfied continuance in his earliest attitudes'. After his first great success Anderson was too eager to publish whatever he wrote, and in his efforts to fulfil his genius in a novel he momentarily lapsed into the middlebrow image of himself that had been created by the widest section of his public: prophet and mystic. But he was too fond of life itself to stand the strain of this falsity for long. He refused to become or to pose as a mage – the fate of so many naïve writers, from Hauptmann through Jammes to Giono (qq.v.) – and instead, never stubbornly or satisfiedly, strove for self-knowledge. In the best of his autobiographical writings his effortful honesty comes naked off the page: it is embarrassing in so sophisticated, so intellectual and so reticent an age. But literature would entirely dry up without its stream fed so copiously by Anderson. It was this that aroused the infuriated envy of the desiccated instructor at Columbia. The *Memoirs* contain writing that is genuinely inspiring (again, an embarrassing concept today): it fills the reader with the desire to search for and try to attain a similar simplicity and similar honesty. There is very little like it in twentieth-century literature. It is beautiful in the important sense that it illuminates and adds meaning to that increasingly difficult word.

For so seminal and original a book *Winesburg, Ohio* has some strangely obvious

sources. The structure is that of the poems of Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River Anthology* (q.v.); the self-revelatory characterization is reminiscent of Turgenev's *A Sportsman's Sketches*; the deliberately oral, indigenous style owes much to Mark Twain, though it updates him; the tone sometimes approaches Howe's in *The Story of a Country Town* (q.v.). Finally, Gertrude Stein (q.v.), whom Anderson early recognized as being essentially 'a writer's writer', liberated him from conventional usage, teaching him what she could not herself achieve: the lyrical expression of intuitions. The episodes in *Winesburg, Ohio*, all centring on the writer-figure of George Willard – a man who brings out something in each of the characters, if only the desire to confess – reveal men as both cursed and blessed by their gift of language: even as they are trapped, they live, they exist, they believe. This arises from a profound scepticism, set out in the prologue to the book and too often ignored. Anderson saw the citizens of Winesburg, and the whole of the modern world, as trapped in what Keats so famously called 'an irritable reaching out after facts and certainties'. Rejecting that multiplicity of apparently contradictory truths that is the actual sum of human knowledge – refusing to be in those 'uncertainties, mysteries, doubts' (Keats) that are proper to the human condition – we (Anderson said) grasp at and appropriate single truths; this distorts us and turns us into grotesques. Anderson's notion throws more light on the nature of society than many searchers after or possessors of systems may care to admit. There are some other short stories by Anderson that reach the level of *Winesburg, Ohio*, from *The Triumph of the Egg* (1921), *Horses and Men* (1923) and *Death in the Woods* (1933). These may be found in *Short Stories* (ed. M. Geismar, 1962). Hart Crane (q.v.) said of this unique writer that his strong sense of nature 'colours his work with the most surprising grasp of what "innocence" and "holiness" ought to mean'. Despite what we know about the financial and domestic pressures, the quiet and beautiful work of Anderson's last decade does, after all, take us back to that winter afternoon in Elyria. . . . He at least did not spoil his myth.

The connection between Anderson and **George Santayana** (ps. **Jorge Ruiz De Santayana Borrás**, 1863–1952), who was born in Spain and retained his Spanish nationality, may seem tenuous. Santayana was an intellectual, and was more important as a philosopher than as a creative writer. Yet he and Anderson are curiously bound together by the sceptical and eclectic philosophy that Santayana ambitiously formulated in *Scepticism and Animal Faith* (1923) and its successors. If Anderson typifies the naïve (q.v.) approach to a certain apprehension of reality, then Santayana typifies the sentimentive (q.v.). Santayana left Spain at the age of nine and was educated in Massachusetts. From 1889 until 1912 he was a professor at Harvard. Then, on receipt of a legacy, he resigned. After many productive years he settled (1939) in a Roman nursing home – the fascists left him alone in the war because of his Spanish nationality. Santayana has written the best prose of any philosopher of the century. His poetry, although technically graceful by the standards of its time, entirely fails to reconcile the disparate sides of his nature; had it succeeded he would have been a great poet. As it was he called himself, rightly, 'almost a poet'. His philosophy is essentially an attempted reconciliation of idealism and realism. It is rightly described by orthodox philosophers as not being thorough-going or 'of [philosophical] consequence': it is more important, though, than any sets of rigorous games, in that it may be immediately related to how men actually feel and live. It is significant that Santayana's initial approach resembles that of a philosopher who stands behind much modern literature, Husserl (q.v.): the application of strict logic results in everything being doubtful. But 'animal faith' compels us to believe in a matter from which what Santayana called 'intuitive essences' have arisen. It is a subtle philosophy, and a profoundly intelligent and ironic modification of scepticism (it is by suffering, Santayana says, that we gain the clue to matter, which we must affirm in a suitably sardonic manner); it

contains anticipations and understandings of modernism in literature. Santayana wrote one distinguished and interesting novel, *The Last Puritan* (1935), in which he contrasts Oliver Alden, the last puritan of the title, with other, hedonistic characters. For a reason that no one could explain, this became a best seller.

In 1931 Santayana had written a book called *The Genteel Tradition at Bay*. This attacked, although with much more cogency, the same tradition that had been Van Wyck Brooks' (q.v.) target. But Santayana was specifically criticizing the movement of the 'new humanism', which was led by Irving Babbitt (1865–1933), who taught French at Harvard for most of his life, and Paul Elmer More (1864–1937), a more interesting figure who interrupted his teaching career to become a distinguished journalist (he edited *The Nation* 1904–14). T.S. Eliot (q.v.) was loosely associated with this movement, although critical of it. The new humanism was thin-blooded, anti-romantic, classical conservative, anti-modernist, intellectual, with some elements of authoritarianism. Essentially it was a foredoomed attempt, by men in general non-creative, to revive what they thought of as transcendentalism. It drew on Christianity, but substituted for its central tenets a universal ethical code. Babbitt advocated an 'inner principle of restraint'. This movement flourished in the Twenties but petered out, after being much attacked and defended, in the Thirties. It is one of the least distinguished of the theories that have come from the better minds of our century. Santayana revealed the new humanism, which claimed to be opposed to decadence, as itself decadent and attenuated. He was particularly withering on the question of the new humanists' supernaturalism, upon which they were vulnerable. *The Last Puritan* was conceived both as a criticism of and a satire on this continuation of the genteel tradition; it was also for Santayana a happy return to the Nineties, when he was still young enough (he said) to sympathize with youth but old enough to understand it. However, in the character of Oliver Alden, and the tragedies of his love and end, Santayana got beyond satire.



Four important women fiction writers emerged in this period. Kate Chopin (1851–1904), born in St. Louis, did not begin to write seriously until after the death of her Creole husband in 1882. She won a notoriety (unwelcome to her) with her novel *The Awakening* (1899). Interest in her has grown so much that her *Collected Works* have recently been issued in a scholarly edition, in two volumes (1970), edited by Per Seyersted. Among the many 'local-colourists' then working she is immediately distinguished by her superior objectivity and psychological conscientiousness. Her best stories are in *Bayou Folk* (1894), often poignant and sometimes ironic studies of the Creoles of Louisiana. In 'Desirée's Baby', her most famous tale, a wealthy aristocrat turns his wife and son out of the house because he suspects them of having Negro blood; then he discovers that he has; meanwhile Desirée kills herself and her child. Kate Chopin's stories are among the earliest of their kind to show real sensibility and freedom from prejudice.

Her major work, however, is her novel *The Awakening*. This tells the torrid story of Edna Pontellier, who fails in love but succeeds in lust – and kills herself. This could fairly be described as a kind of Creole *Madame Bovary* (Kate Chopin had read Flaubert), although its purpose is different. It is a tragedy that the hostile reviews of this fine book should have broken her spirit.

Another gift that deliberately confined itself to a single locality (Maine), but that displayed itself in tales rather than novels, is that of Sarah Orne Jewett (1849–1909). It would be impertinent to describe her as a local-colourist: her wide culture and worldly

humour are always in evidence. Her novels are negligible, and the series of sketches with which she made her reputation, *Deephaven* (1877), are slight in comparison with those of her acknowledged masterpiece, *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896). By then she had assimilated the influence of James (q.v.) as well as of Flaubert, Tolstoy and other Europeans; but she wisely confined herself to the limits of her experience. *The Country of the Pointed Firs* consists of loosely connected tales about the people in the beautifully evoked seaport town of Dunnet. This deserves its status as a classic because in its unobtrusive way it says so much about old age (most of the characters are elderly) and the manner in which a place may embody both decay and hope, as well as about Maine. Willa Cather (q.v.) was deeply influenced by it.

Ellen Glasgow (1874–1945), born of an aristocratic family in Richmond, Virginia, came to revolt against the tradition into which she was born and in which she began – although not with absolute obedience – writing: the sentimental tradition of the old domain of the South as a lost cause, and of the Civil War as an affair between honour and commerce. Ellen Glasgow's fiction set out to investigate this legend. She had a highly developed sense of humour, and, like Sarah Orne Jewett (q.v.), she chose to write about the locality, Virginia, that she knew best. The teacher and critic H.S. Canby claimed, with justice, that Ellen Glasgow in her nineteen novels 'was a major historian of our times, who, almost singlehandedly, rescued Southern fiction from the glamorous sentimentality of the Lost Cause'. The work in which she accomplished this was mostly done in the Twenties; in old age she became over-conservative, though not unintelligently so, in the sense that she found she could not accept such manifestations of the modern age as bad manners or William Faulkner (q.v.). Her main theme was the consequences of the Southern myth on Southerners themselves. She is also notable for her resistance to the notion that all Southerners are alike. She always, in her own words, 'preferred the spirit of fortitude to the sense of futility'. To some extent Ellen Glasgow anticipated the concerns of the 'Fugitives' group (q.v.), but her approach was more mordant and even, judged just as an approach and not as a breeding ground for poems, preferable. There was not as much to recommend about life in the South before 1860 as Margaret Mitchell's best-selling romance, *Gone With the Wind*, suggests. But later Southerners, and much more intelligent and sensitive ones than Margaret Mitchell, have cherished such an image.

Like most of the novelists of her generation, Ellen Glasgow was of a pessimistic turn of mind, although it was doubtless personal experience that led her to the limiting view that life consists of specifically sexual disappointment followed by stoical acceptance. In her treatment of her thus sexually defeated people there is sometimes an element that goes beyond irony and becomes gloating and almost cheap. From the quality of this irony and of her not always successful epigrammatic writing, one may discern, in fact, that she is not of the first rank. But she is consistently adult, and her best books rise above her intentions. In *Barren Ground* (1925) the 'poor white' Dorinda Oakley, crossed in love, turns her father's barren ground into a farm with as much determination as Ellen Glasgow had put into her fiction writing just before the turn of the century; ultimately, having contracted one marriage of convenience, she marries the man, now a drunk, who turned her down, caring for him until he dies. Dorinda is a memorable creation. *The Romantic Comedians* (1926) is a surprisingly sympathetic treatment of a hypocritical and lustful old judge, Gamaliel Bland Honeywell. The book begins as he buries his wife. A respectable man who disapproves of 'sexual looseness', he marries a young cousin of his dead wife; she immediately makes him a cuckold, and runs off with her lover. The old man becomes ill and depressed, but we leave him cheered up by spring and the charms of his young nurse. Neither we nor the author dislike him half as much as we should. The Judge,

shallow and self-deceiving, is rightly described by Walter Allen as a 'considerable comic creation'; but, as Allen goes on to point out, his fantasies of romantic love are – surprisingly and unusually – given a genuinely lyrical quality, so that he becomes a character actually touching in his defeat. *Vein of Iron* (1935) is not as a whole quite as psychologically acute, but contains fine passages, and effectively sums up Ellen Glasgow's attitudes to the South and to life. Her title expresses her recommended philosophy. Ada Fincastle displays this 'vein of iron' throughout all her and her loved ones' vicissitudes; it enables her to endure her father's lack of reality, the pregnancy she cannot (out of love) disclose, ostracism by the community, her husband's bitterness, poverty during the Depression. Ellen Glasgow makes an excellent 'introduction to the South' and to the more complex novels of Faulkner: she makes explicit much of the knowledge of the South that, as Walter Allen has said, Faulkner assumes in us. Certainly some dozen of her novels ought to be back in print. Those who think *Gone With the Wind* a good book need only read Glasgow.

But the most considerable woman novelist of the period was undoubtedly Willa Cather (1873–1947). She was born in Virginia but moved to Nebraska, whose people are the subject of most of her novels and stories, at the age of nine. She never forgot the pioneering spirit of the immigrants, who in her childhood often lived in sod houses or caves. Nor, it must be added, could her later fiction adjust itself to what America became. She was a late developer. She was educated at the University of Nebraska and had a tough journalistic apprenticeship on *McClure's Magazine* (1906–12). She had been writing verse and short stories since before the turn of the century, but did not publish her first novel, *Alexander's Bridge* (1912), until she was nearly forty. This was a failure because of a too intrusive symbolism; but the subtly flawed, nostalgic character of its engineer hero already indicated that Willa Cather's scope was larger than that of any previous American woman novelist. In the most successful *O Pioneers!* (1913) she went back to her greatest love and inspiration: the late nineteenth-century settlers in the Nebraska prairie. Like Ellen Glasgow (q.v.), Willa Cather excelled in the portraiture of strong-minded women; here Alexandra has to assume responsibility for the farm after her Swedish father dies. Her moral superiority to those around her is convincingly conveyed. The episode of 'The White Mulberry Tree' – the story of the doomed romance of Alexandra's younger brother Emil with Marie, whose husband murders them both – fits in and perfectly complements the main narrative.

In *The Song of the Lark* (1915) Willa Cather tried unsuccessfully to deal more or less directly with the subject of herself: her opera-singer Thea Kronberg is clearly based on herself, although supposed to be modelled on an actual singer's career. The author told herself that she was most interested in the way in which her heroine 'escaped' through a fortuitous falling together of commonplace events; actually she was interested in, but ultimately afraid to deal with, the nature of her sexuality. On the one hand she shows Thea as regretful of the asceticism that she feels is a penalty of art; on the other, it is clear that her irritation with men does not originate in her creativity but in lesbianism.

*My Ántonia* (1918) is probably Willa Cather's finest novel. It is an unhappy New York lawyer's middle-aged recollections of his Nebraska childhood, and of his dear companion, the Czech Antonia. This is one of the most moving and powerful of pastoral evocations; the lawyer Jim Burden's present unhappiness is the result of his urban existence with its betrayal of the values of his childhood. *A Lost Lady* (1923) is as moving but not as convincing: here Willa Cather is beginning to manipulate her characters in order to prove her point about urban corruption. *Ántonia* remains a saved character; in *A Lost Lady* Mrs. Forrester yields to the corrupting embraces of Ivy Peters, a vulgar, slick lawyer: her worth is destroyed. This is a good novel, but one may see in it the germs of

Willa Cather's sentimentalization of the pioneer age: the idealized portraits of the pioneers themselves, the too easy dismissal of those born to a commercial and urban way of life. In her great success *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927) she goes back to the middle of the nineteenth century and the organization of the diocese of New Mexico by two close friends, Bishop Jean Latour and his vicar Father Joseph Vaillant. This is more satisfactory because Willa Cather is writing about the era she loves: there is no temptation to load the dice against the present. In this book Willa Cather's style reached its apogee, achieving epic qualities. There is deep understanding of both the missionary Roman Catholics' and the Indians' point of view. Willa Cather was a major writer, but not one big enough to take creative account of the changes in her century. This is not to say that her hatred of urbanization was wrong; only that it was too intense. She failed to understand that some men are victims of their circumstances. She did in the end turn spinsterish and difficult. But she gallantly resisted the intrusion of journalistic vulgarity (it must be remembered that she had been a journalist) into the novel, and her best books offer a unique evocation of the midwest of her youth.



Finally, an unclassifiable odd man out: will anyone ever revive even the best-known novels of **James Branch Cabell** (1879–1958)? Cabell, born in Virginia, was an expert in genealogy – and was what might be described as a latter-day escapist. Hatred of modern life caused him to invent his own country, Poictesme, his epic of which is much and tiresomely concerned with the imaginary genealogy of its leading family. His books are 'naughty', and now seem desperately dated; indeed, his reputation collapsed in the Twenties because it had been founded, unfortunately, upon an unsuccessful prosecution of his novel *Jurgen* (1919). This, irritating though it is in its highly self-conscious artiness and sly phallicism, may be a book that will deserve to be looked at again. In this sceptical tale of a middle-aged Poictesme pawnbroker who has a series of fantastic adventures Cabell examined his romanticism and found it wanting. An age only a little later than our own may more easily be able to penetrate the tortuous style and discover some wisdom that it obscures. But I doubt it: Cabell was the victim of a cult and shaped his style according to it; unfortunately his bitterness when he went out of fashion did not result in any recapture of the genius underlying *Jurgen*. The only novelist remotely resembling him now, with due allowance for changing fashion, is Robert Nye (q.v.), and then only occasionally.

## II

Although American poetry did not show its true strength until after the First World War, the poets from whose example its most modern manifestations spring were active before that war – and nearly all of them had to wait a long time for public recognition. The first fully and authentically American poet was Walt Whitman. But Whitman was not fully understood until as late as 1955, when Richard Chase's book *Walt Whitman Reconsidered*

was published. Interest in him continued to grow after his death in 1892 and he was the rallying cry of many splinter movements; but he was treated as a mystic, a mage, a socialist, a homosexual, a 'transexualist', anything rather than as a discoverer of an American voice who was also a complicated hider behind various masks. Whitman had his faults, and his intellectual equipment was hardly superior to Dreiser's; but he and Emily Dickinson, unknown in her lifetime, were the only major American poets of the nineteenth century.

The poets most highly considered in the first decade of this century have vanished from sight; nor is there much of value or even of interest to salvage from their work. **Richard Henry Stoddard** (1825–1903), called in the year of his death 'the most distinguished of living American poets', was no more than an imitator of English Victorian poets who celebrated Abraham Lincoln in the English Victorian manner. **Thomas Bailey Aldrich** (1836–1907) was not quite undistinguished as a novelist, but as a poet was a scented and weak imitator of Tennyson. Of somewhat more account was the Ohio poet **Paul Laurence Dunbar** (1872–1906), who was at least the first Negro to use Negro dialect (he was preceded by a number of white men); but he did not know the South, and the most that can be said of his best work is that it has some grace and style.

The 'Harvard generation' of the Nineties promised much, but performed little. **William Vaughn Moody** (1869–1910) was intelligent and even tried to achieve a modicum of sexual realism; but in spite of his skill no poem he wrote deserves to survive, and his verse drama – *The Fire-Bringer* (1904) was the best known – is stilted. It is sometimes claimed that Moody influenced Wallace Stevens (q.v.), and this may be true; but only of the Wallace Stevens of juvenilia, which he destroyed. That Moody was a formative influence is unlikely. Moody's best work was done in the prose drama, and is mentioned in the section devoted to theatre.

More poetically gifted was Moody's Harvard friend [**Joseph**] **Trumbull Stickney** (1874–1904), whom Santayana (q.v.) recollected as one of the two most brilliant men he had ever known. Stickney's life was cosmopolitan. He was born in Switzerland, and spent his childhood in Europe. After he graduated from Harvard in 1895 he again left immediately for Europe. He was the first American to receive the *Doctorat des Lettres* from the Sorbonne. Stickney finally returned to Harvard, to the post of Instructor in Greek. After only one unhappy year of teaching he died of a brain tumour. Stickney, like his friend Moody, wrote plays: his *Dramatic Verses* (1902) made no impact whatever, but when Moody and two others collected his *Poems* (1905), interest was briefly aroused. The English poets James Reeves and Seán Haldane (qq.v.) made a selection, *Homage to Trumbull Stickney* (1968), which contains a valuable biographical and critical introduction. Messrs. Reeves and Haldane quote lines such as 'Your face possesses my despair', 'He stubborned like the massive slaughter-beast', 'That power was once our torture and our Lord' and 'I have it all through my heart, I tell you, crying' to illustrate their contention that he is 'more a rejected than a neglected American poet of genius'. Another view puts him on a level with Moody and suggests that both 'occasionally capture the modern manner, only to lose it again in a plethora of words' (Marcus Cunliffe). It seems to me that, moving though some of Stickney's poems are, his language would need to be considerably less archaic for him to be as exceptional as Reeves and Haldane claim. Cunliffe's 'the modern manner' is perhaps misleading; what Stickney needed was a language capable of expressing – primarily, indeed, of discovering – a set of highly complex prepossessions. Now Stickney certainly had a 'modern' sensibility, but in almost all his poems he tends to lapse into a diction and tone which are alien to this sensibility. Feeling in his poetry tends to be robbed of sharpness and impact by muddy, self-indulgent diction, and sometimes by an ear that is more metrical than rhythmical. He

lacks a formed style. But certainly he is, as Donald Hall has said, one of America's 'great unfulfilled talents'.

While most of these poets and others – such as the Canadian-born **Bliss Carman** (1861–1929), whose 'carefree' verse now seems so laboured, the verse playwright **Percy Mackaye** (1875–1956), or **Josephine Preston Peabody** (1874–1922), who was influenced by Moody – were enjoying some esteem, **Edwin Arlington Robinson** (1869–1935) was ignored. He did not achieve real recognition until he was fifty. For the duration of the Twenties he was America's most popular poet (Frost's, q.v., ascendancy came later), but before he died of cancer in 1935 his stock had begun to go down, and between the Second World War and the beginning of the Sixties he was almost forgotten by critics (although his massive *Collected Poems* has sold consistently at about twelve copies a week since it appeared in 1937). In the last decade there has been a revival of interest: his excellent letters are now being collected, and many books have been devoted to him. Even at the height of his fame, which did not go to his head, Robinson was never at the centre of any coterie or cult, and no one knew much of his private life – except that he was unmarried, rumoured (incorrectly) to be homosexual and had an alcohol problem. Neither Eliot nor the usually percipient, just and generous Ezra Pound (qq.v.) indicated that they had troubled to read him: this was a mistake, for all of Prufrock – and more – is in him. The fact is that he was the only fully-fledged American poet to come out of the 'gilded age' (the title of Mark Twain's and Charles Dudley Warren's melodramatic novel denouncing its instability and acquisitiveness) that followed the Civil War; in this age Robinson was formed. Nor is Robinson as far behind the vastly more ambitious Frost as the difference between their reputations suggests. Robinson did not write the handful of nearly perfect poems that Frost did as a young man; but he had a wider range and wrote more penetratingly about people. He was psychologically far ahead of Frost – and ahead of him in sensibility. In many respects he remained a child of the nineteenth century, his roots in Crabbe, Hardy, Browning; but if one compares the diction of his early poems to that of Stickney's (q.v.), the best of the poets who failed to attain a twentieth-century manner, it will be obvious that Robinson did at least find a language appropriate to what he had to say. That does not of itself guarantee the value of the poems themselves; but in this case they are good poems precisely because their author has discovered a new language to say new things. In Stickney the sentimentality and easy assumptions of the age linger on – alas – in the diction and style; Robinson's manner cuts through all this like a knife. What he can do in his best poetry (the shorter ones), besides expressing some personal emotions, is to give an authentic account of what it is like trying to be a nineteenth-century man in a twentieth-century society. That is something.

He was born at Head Tide, Maine, but moved to Gardiner, in the same state, six months after his birth; this environment marked him for the rest of his life, and the Tilbury Town of his poems is Gardiner. Robinson became aware of his lonely poetic vocation there (he was an exceptionally lonely man), and there too he learned to identify himself with failure. His mother and father kept him at such a distance as to imply to him their rejection of him; his two brothers were always expected to outshine him. Ultimately, however, he was the success of the family: his father failed financially and went to pieces under the strain, and the eldest brother turned from a promising doctor into a drug addict. Robinson himself attended Harvard until the money ran out, then turned – still in his twenties – into a lonely and alcoholic drop-out. He published two books privately, and for the third, *Captain Craig* (1902), the publishers Houghton Mifflin had to be guaranteed against loss. President Theodore Roosevelt was given this book to read in 1905, enthused, and obtained a sinecure for Robinson in the New York Customs House, which he retained until the change in the presidency in 1909. During that time of

comparative independence Robinson drank heavily and wrote little. It was the poems of *The Man Against the Sky* (1916) which finally gained him public acceptance; but it was not until the eve of his fiftieth birthday that critics and poets alike joined together in tribute to him. From 1911 until the end of his life Robinson spent his summers at the MacDowell Colony, founded by the widow of the gifted (and, outside America, still neglected) American composer Edward A. MacDowell, as a refuge for creative artists of all kinds. He published two plays, which are interesting but not viable theatrically, and wrote fiction, all of which he destroyed. Eventually he confined himself entirely to the long verse narrative: *Tristram* (1927), a national success, completed an Arthurian trilogy; he was at work on *King Jasper* to within a few weeks of his death. It is always said that Robinson fails in these very long poems. And so he does. What is not said often enough is that he comes nearer to success in this form than any other poet writing at the time.

One of Robinson's subtlest and most characteristic poems is 'Flammonde', in which he exploits commonplace and cliché in a strategy that is quite certainly 'modern' in its implications. The wooden didact Yvor Winters dismissed it as 'repulsively sentimental'; but William J. Free, in an important essay, has shown how Robinson in this instance did succeed in finding a suitable, if ambiguous, language to express his uneasy situation. As Free says, 'he was trying to restore life to a worn-out language without abandoning that language'. Flammonde is just such an enigmatic and alienated character as Robinson felt himself to be, but Robinson ironically presents him as seen through the eyes of the townspeople: he has wisdom, but this is remarkable because he is not respectable; he has 'something royal in his walk' and has been 'accredited' 'by kings', but has been banished from that kind of life. Robinson turns Flammonde's *noblesse oblige* into a caricature by making him befriend an ex-'scarlet woman' – one of the worst clichés of the period. In his brain the kink is 'satanic'. Flammonde is the poet seen from the angle of the crowd, vulgarly mysterious, cheaply sinister, and yet necessary:

We cannot know how much we learn  
From those who never will return,  
Until a flash of unforeseen  
Remembrance falls on what has been.  
We've each a darkening hill to climb;  
And this is why, from time to time  
In Tilbury Town we look beyond  
Horizons for the man Flammonde.

'Flammonde' demonstrates Robinson's inability to define his poetic function directly, and incidentally explains why he invariably expressed himself through a strategy of characterizations. Thus he found his Flammonde in an Englishman called Alfred H. Louis, a well-connected failure; when in the more famous and longer *Captain Craig* he tried to be more explicit, to dissolve some of the mystery, about the objective correlative he had discovered in this person he was not quite as successful – although this, too, is an interesting poem.

Robinson wrote a number of other excellent short poems. The celebrated 'Miniver Cheevy' sums up his own situation even more tersely. It has been pointed out that the fourth 'thought' of

Miniver scorned the gold he sought  
But sore annoyed was he without it;

Miniver thought and thought and thought  
And thought about it

'comes as an authentic kick in the womb of a stanza that proves the existence of a live poet'; it has the touch of a master. Equally good are 'Eros Turannos', 'Isaac and Archibald', 'Saint-Nitouche' and some others. The narrative poems, naturalistic in the sense that they show people at the mercy of their passions, are unrivalled in their field – Masfield's (q.v.) aim at so much less – in that they are all, even the lushest (*Tristram*), readable and interesting; one may come across a good passage at any time. A properly selected Robinson – still lacking – would have to include some of these, as well as the best of the shorter poems and such medium length narratives as 'Isaac and Archibald'. Robinson may have been a late romantic and even a transcendentalist, who allowed a false optimism to mar much of his poetry; but his was the only nineteenth-century sensibility to express itself effectively in twentieth-century terms. His influence has been considerable although, except in the case of Robert Lowell's *The Mills of the Kavanaughs* (q.v.), unobtrusive. His stock is certainly rising.

Now for three lesser, but undoubtedly important poets, all from the state of Illinois: Edgar Lee Masters, Carl Sandburg and Vachel Lindsay (qq.v.). All of these were quintessentially American as distinct from English-style poets. In this sense, but only in this, each was superior to Robinson (q.v.). **Edgar Lee Masters** (1868–1950) was the son of a lawyer who himself became a lawyer; born in Kansas, moved to Illinois at one, he wrote much both before and after *The Spoon River Anthology* (1915), but never produced anything remotely near to it in quality. A newspaper editor gave him Mackail's *Select Epigrams from the Greek Anthology* in 1911, and this acted as the catalyst required to manufacture the acid of his own genius, compounded of an innate bitterness, a passion for truth, and a rare sympathy for human beings. Spoon River was an amalgamation of Petersburg and Lewistown. In a flat, laconic free verse Masters makes the inhabitants of the Spoon River hill cemetery state their own epitaphs. He resembles Robinson, but is more direct and less officially optimistic:

Did you ever hear of the Circuit Judge  
Helping anyone except the 'Q' railroad,  
Or the bankers . . . ?

This was a poetry in the prose tradition initiated by Howe, Garland (qq.v.) and others; but the compression he learned from the Greek Anthology enabled Masters to improve on it. However, *The Spoon River Anthology* is better considered as prose than as poetry; as poetry it lacks linguistic energy.

**Vachel Lindsay** (1879–1931), born in Springfield, Illinois, obtained a good education, and then studied art for five years; but he failed at it, and decided to become a tramp. His drawings look like meagre and talentless imitations of Blake. Lindsay had always wanted to be a missionary, and in 1905 he alternated winter lecturing with summer tramping and declaiming; he would exchange leaflets of his poems for a bed and food. By 1913 he had become well known. Harriet Monroe began to publish his poetry, and *General William Booth Enters into Heaven and Other Poems* (1913) and *The Congo and Other Poems* (1914) were successful. For some fifteen years he enjoyed fame as declaimer of his own work all over America and in Great Britain as well. Public interest in him lessened soon after his marriage in 1925; in 1931, in despair and ill-health, he took poison.

Lindsay was a midwestern populist and revivalist whose views never altered or expanded with his experience of the greater world. His father was a Campbellite minister

(member of the Church of the Disciples of Christ, which had broken away from Presbyterianism to a simplicity based solely on the Bible). Lindsay combined this evangelical creed with worship of Lincoln and other local heroes, religious ideas of Swedenborg, and the economics of Henry George (q.v.). He was vulgar and parochial, but at his best he knew it, and exploited these very failings. His sources are revivalist hymns and sermons, Whitman's manner and tone, temperance tracts, Negro jazz, all the sayings and doings of Lincoln and other lesser known, local heroes, and Salvation Army brass band music. He learnt much about the performance of poetry from the readings of S.H. Clark, a professor at the University of Chicago. His best poems succeed because they are impassioned and wholly unsophisticated. To put it at its most simple: he meant every word of them, and for a few years he found exactly the right combination of sources. He introduced a genuinely new rhythm into American poetry; he was also America's first genuine folk poet – at his best he is superior to Sandburg. Later he went to pieces and produced too much weak and self-parodic verse. The novelist Richard Hughes (q.v.) heard him at Oxford, and recorded for the British Broadcasting Corporation some remarkable and highly illuminating renderings of his poetry.

It was Harriet Monroe's *Poetry* that gave Carl Sandburg (1878–1967) fame. Born at Galesburg of Swedish immigrant parents, from thirteen he was an itinerant labourer all over the West; he served in the Spanish-American war, worked his way through college in his home town, and became a journalist and socialist. His master was Whitman, but although more genuinely 'of the people' than Whitman he is a minor poet by comparison, because he is never more than a reporter. He used very free forms, and his poetry resembles Masters' in that it is by no means certainly properly judged as poetry, but rather as a rhythmical prose. At his worst he is whimsical, sentimental and falsely tough; at his rare best colloquial, tender and precise. He could be defined as an ideal 'unanimist' (q.v.): he responded to and thoroughly understood the corporate longings of the new industrial folk, and he fervently believed in their happy future. His weakness is that he has no creative means of confronting evil. The famous stanza about John Brown

They laid hands on him  
And the fool killers had a laugh  
And the necktie party was a go, by God.  
They laid hands on him and he was a goner.  
    They hammered him to pieces and he stood up.  
They buried him and he walked out of the grave, by God,  
    Asking again: Where did that blood come from?

owes all its strength to the presentation of John Brown's vitality as a folk hero; Sandburg could not cope with, and was a child in trying to deal with, the forces of evil. But his best poems reflect midwestern speech, and in rigorous selection they will continue to survive. He wrote a monumental biography of Lincoln (1926–39) and made two important collections of local American folk ballads, *The American Songbag* (1927) and *The New American Songbag* (1950).

At his death Robert Frost (1874–1963) was America's most famous poet and unofficial laureate. No other American has reached his eminence in letters. And yet he waited as long as – and even more bitterly than – Robinson (q.v.) for recognition. He was born in San Francisco of a New England father and a Scots mother; when he was eleven his father died, and the family moved to Salem, New Hampshire, where his mother taught in a school. Frost worked in mills and as a newspaper reporter, taught, married, spent two years at Harvard and tried to be a poultry farmer – all unsuccessfully. At the age of thirty-

six he sold his farm in Derry and went to England, where he settled down to write. In England he met Wilfred Gibson, Ezra Pound, Lascelles Abercrombie and, most importantly, Edward Thomas (qq.v.), whom he encouraged to write poetry. While he was in England his first two books of poetry were accepted: *A Boy's Will* (1913) and *North of Boston* (1914). The second was published in America by Holt in the same year, and when he returned to the States early in 1915 he found he was the author of a best seller. For many years after this he spent periods as poet-in-residence in various academic institutions. The rest of the time he spent on farms he bought in Vermont and, finally, in Florida. He had much sorrow with his children: one died of puerperal fever, and his son Carol shot himself. At the end of his life, although an outspoken and fierce conservative, and a lifelong enemy of all things academic, he had twice been greeted by the Senate (on his seventy- and eighty-fifth birthdays), taken part as unofficial laureate in the inauguration of John F. Kennedy, and received nearly fifty honorary degrees (including ones from Oxford and Cambridge).

To say that Frost has been overrated is not to say that he is unimportant. He was a naïve (q.v.) poet, and when he took thought never more than a skilled folksy epigrammatist, who in order to cling on to his so hardly won fame had to write too much, and not always in his natural vein. His pose as sage seldom led to wisdom, and hardly does the true poet in him credit. The poems of *A Boy's Will* are less certain than those of *North of Boston*, his best book, and the confidence of this extends into some of the poetry of its two successors, *Mountain Interval* (1916) and *New Hampshire* (1923). After this Frost was increasingly intent on subscribing to an image of himself largely formed by people who had little knowledge of or love for the arts in general. His poems can be optimistic and cheerful when he does not really feel like that – he conceals his blackness – and he can be arch and self-consciously Yankee.

But when this has been said Frost is still a unique and original poet both in short lyrics and in certain comparatively short narrative poems. The famous 'Mending Wall' is a good enough example of his strength; it alone is enough to give pause when we are told that the claim that Frost is a major poet is 'ridiculous'. This is a genuinely tragic poem: it spells out how things are between people. Lawrence Thompson, Frost's biographer, suggests that 'the conclusion resolves the conflict in favour of the poet's view. . . .' It seems to me that this judgement does not do it justice: it is more than an expression of a mere point of view, for while the wall is a real wall, it also stands for that barrier of reserve which neighbours erect between each other – to avoid being friends, or to protect themselves. We are told that 'Something there is that doesn't love a wall': frosts break it up. Hunters have the same effect. At 'spring mending-time' he gets in touch with his neighbours, and together they make the repairs, piling the boulders up. It's only a game, the narrator tells us: a wall isn't necessary at this point, since his neighbour is 'all pine' and he is apple orchard. He tackles his neighbour with this – 'Spring is the mischief in me', he explains, thus surely negating Thompson's assertion that the notion of having no wall is his seriously held point of view – but the neighbour only says 'Good fences make good neighbours'. However, mischievously he continues to taunt his neighbour, who goes on rebuilding the wall 'like an old-stone savage armed'; and the narrator concludes

He moves in darkness as it seems to me,  
 Not of woods only and the shades of trees.  
 He will not go behind his father's saying,  
 And he likes having thought of it so well  
 He says again, 'Good fences make good neighbours'.

This is 'about' the barriers between people and the worth of love; maybe the conservative neighbour is right. Frost could and did moralize in his lesser poems; in this good one he is content to leave things as they are, tragically in balance. Yes, spring has made him challenge (with 'mischief') the notion of a wall; but there is no pat conclusion, no suggestion that it is his neighbour's state of mind that is responsible for the state of affairs. . . . The poem works so well because its full meaning arises so naturally out of the situation it describes; there is no straining for a meaning in the account.

Again, it would surely be risky to dismiss the narrative 'The Death of the Hired Man', also from *North of Boston*, as only a minor poem. It is true that Frost's people are cardboard, and that they do not act upon each other or change each other; it is also true that his technical arrangements are static – the oft-made claim that he used American speech-rhythms cannot be carried far. But this account of the return of a hired man, and the differing views of a husband and wife about charity and their duty, attains such simplicity –

'Home is the place where, when you have to go there,  
They have to take you in.'  
'I should have called it  
Something you somehow haven't to deserve.'

– that it cannot be ignored. It offers, for the time being, something other than the urban sophistication of Eliot (q.v.). So do a half dozen other similar narratives, most of them included in *North of Boston*. Frost is not usually a 'nature poet', for he does not observe natural objects minutely; he rather observes man in natural surroundings, and tries to find consolations for nature's indifference. He can be falsely sweet, as when he asks us to come with him while he cleans out the pasture spring (he does not mean it); but he achieves true sweetness when he reveals his desire for a valid and unsentimental universal love, as at the end of 'The Tuft of Flowers', from his first book:

'Men work together,' I told him from the heart,  
'Whether they work together or apart'.

All Frost's concern with communality and love stemmed from his violent ambitiousness and black solitariness: he woke an enormous guilt in himself. Most of the poems of his last thirty years are good exercises; but while he struggled with himself, he wrote a poetry that is as secure as any.

Frost's influence on American poets of account may, surprisingly, be somewhat less than even that of Robinson (q.v.). Robinson remains enigmatic, unexplored; there does not at present seem to be very much to go to Frost for. The same can under no circumstances be said of the prince of American regionalist poets, **William Carlos Williams** (1883–1963), who was born in Rutherford, New Jersey, practised there as a doctor all his life, and died there. He studied dentistry at the University of Pennsylvania, where he met Pound (q.v.), and later went to Europe to study medicine. By 1912 he was married and settled into his lifelong practice at Rutherford, partly the Paterson of his long poem of that name.

'Williams . . . is . . . the most innocently tedious, insufferably monotonous, and purely mental of modern poets . . . polythene verse. . . . [His] form conceals that he is saying very little, and has very little to say. . . .' (An English critic.)

'Williams' poems contain a generosity of spirit, a humane warmth, ability to translate daily life and ordinary objects into an unsentimental order of personal and universal

significance, which are unique in modern poetry and rare at any time. . . . His ear for rhythm is practically perfect. . . .' (An American critic.)

The first judgement may be turned somewhat to Williams' advantage if we grant that, for all his multifarious pronouncements, Williams was a naïve (q.v.) poet – a good deal more naïve than Frost (q.v.), himself disingenuous in his intellectual pose. His overriding passion (it was never a thought) from early on was that poetry should reflect experience exactly, and that therefore rhyme and metre were falsifications: non-American, Anglophile devices. What he has to say about rhythm is neither well thought out nor interesting; mainly it is silly. He attacked Eliot (q.v.) and Pound for not staying in America, and imagism (q.v.) for being mere free verse. His 'objectivism' (q.v.) postulated the poem itself as object, presenting its meaning by its form. 'No ideas but in things', he insisted, seeking until the end to describe the universal only in the stubborn particular. He went his own singular way, inconsistent, obstinate, publishing his poetry with obscure small presses – and ended up as a grand old man of American letters, inspirer not only of Olsen, Ginsberg, Creeley (qq.v.), but, less logically, also of the formalists Roethke and Lowell (qq.v.). He wrote autobiography, impressionistic criticism (*In the American Grain*, 1925), plays, short stories and fiction.

All Williams' work flows out of his insistence upon the local and the particular. He saw the world 'contracted to a recognizable image'. His poems are his namings of the objects in his world as it unfolds itself to him. His own words, written when he was at his most energetic, and when he was hardly heeded, are incomparably the best expression of his intentions:

There is a constant barrier between the reader and his consciousness of immediate contact with the world. . . . I love my fellow creature. Jesus, how I love him . . . but he doesn't exist! Neither does she. I do, in a bastardly sort of way. . . . In the composition, the artist does exactly what every eye must do with life, fix the particular with the universality of his own personality. . . . The only realism in art is of the imagination. It is only thus that the work escapes plagiarism after nature and becomes a creation. . . . [Shakespeare] holds no mirror up to nature but with his imagination rivals nature's composition with his own. . . .

That last remark gives us the clue both to Williams and the appeal he had for so many Americans. Here is a man who insists on the evidence of his own perceptions. As Marianne Moore (q.v.) shrewdly said of him: he has 'a kind of intellectual hauteur which one usually associates with the French'. Indeed, we have only to remember the philosophy behind the French *nouveau roman* (q.v.) to recognize this: but this is a doggone, non-intellectual, Yankee approach. Williams exists on the strength of his perceptions or he does not exist. After some early imitations of Keats, he began writing in the vein that he maintained until his death. It is seen at its best in 'This Is Just To Say' – surely an irresistible if relentlessly minor little lyric?

*This Is Just To Say*

I have eaten  
the plums  
that were in  
the icebox

and which  
 you were probably  
 saving  
 for breakfast

Forgive me  
 they were delicious  
 so sweet  
 and so cold

Williams' long poem *Paterson* (1946–58), his attempt at an epic, in five books, is distinctly American in its attempt to recover innocence and a sense of community. It is characteristically impressionistic: in large part it consists of seemingly casual collage of undoctored raw material – heard conversation, private letters, news clippings, official reports, bald anecdotes, and so on. It contains some vigorous and compelling passages, but suffers from two contradictory defects. Williams wants to appear non-literary, ordinary, and so to this end he includes far too much unedited material in the poem; this makes it tedious. However, at the same time the essentially naïve poet artfully and disingenuously tries to superimpose a symbolic pattern on the poem: for example, an analogy is worked out between the poet's and the physicist's function, even to the extent of comparing the splitting of the atom to the splitting of the (metrical) foot. . . . (this last is peculiarly tiresome and idiosyncratic). The first two books hold together better than the rest, but even these contain dull passages; the rest fails to convince or to cohere, although some enthusiastic critics have stated otherwise. Williams' technique here more closely parallels that of painters than poets: 'he strives', writes a critic, 'for a poem that will, in its own process, answer the question it continually poses.' This is no more than the old, anti-mimetic insistence on creation, the necessity he felt to 'rival nature's composition with his own. . . .' It does not work, but comes near enough to doing so for us to wish that Williams had not tried to be so artful: he was not good at it.

However, Williams' anti-mimetic preoccupation is enough to demonstrate that he is no spurious modern, as the English critic quoted above has suggested. It is true that in an intellectual or metaphysical sense Williams has nothing whatever to say. But is he that kind of writer? Is he not, rather, simply a recorder of his perceptions? That these are often simplistic is beside the point. They are almost inevitably unspoiled. However, can Williams, on the strength of his best things – such fragments as 'El Hombre',

It's a strange courage  
 you give me ancient star:

Shine alone in the sunrise  
 toward which you lend no part!

– be called a major poet? As a pioneer he is obviously of importance. But is his poetry intrinsically major? The poem of his old age, of some 350 lines, called 'Asphodel, That Greeny Flower', is probably his crowning achievement. It is hard not to respond to it. But are we not perhaps responding to the integrity and sweet cussedness of personality, to a devoted life, rather than to a substantial poetic achievement? The answer to the question is not to be easily found. In my own judgement there is as much of the simple-minded as of the simple about Williams, so that he is finally a physician and minor poet rather than a major poet and a physician. He always wanted desperately to be 'average', and I think

that his simplicities, too, were near the average. ... (Evidently Wordsworth's, say, weren't.) One appreciates the way he lived and felt and talked; but even 'Asphodel, That Greeny Flower' offers no insight, only a chance to applaud that performance. In order to attain to it he eschewed all alien devices, so that his poems lack tension. And a whole poetry that lacks tension is inexorably minor. Further, his rhythms lack tension: the 'practically perfect' ear is just loose, rhetorical praise.

And now, since it is relevant to most of the American poetry that follows, a word about Williams and poetic technique. Williams many times announced that he had discovered a new, American poetic technique, which he referred to as the 'variable foot'. Williams was no prosodist, and his attempted definitions of his variable foot are worthless. But it does mean something in terms of his own practice:

Of asphodel, that greeny flower,  
 like a buttercup  
 upon its branching stem –  
 save that it's green and wooden –  
 I come, my sweet,  
 to sing to you.  
 We lived long together  
 a life filled  
 if you will. . . .

Each of those 'lines' is a 'variable foot'; at one time Williams would have called it a 'triadic foot', comprising a single 'line'. And the reader will quickly appreciate that, while Williams himself achieved a personal rhythm by writing in this way, his imitators have not. This way of writing verse should be discussed, and there are new elements in it (even though one can treat Williams' verse in terms of the various traditional approaches to prosody); but it has not been usefully discussed yet – least of all by Williams, who waded thigh deep into the old bog of confusion between accent and quantity that has bedevilled English prosodic studies since Elizabethan times. This has not often been intelligently discussed, although it has excited poets. Accent in English poetry will always be the main factor; but syllabic length adds another. Syllable-counting without reference to duration of syllable results in a purely mechanical, arhythmical verse. Williams' confused theory comes nearer to the 'temporal' prosody advanced by the American poet Sidney Lanier, who died in 1881. What is original in his practice – 'not that,' he wrote, 'I know anything about what I have myself written' – is the accommodation he gives to quantity without straining its function in the vernacular: without, as the Elizabethan Stanyhurst, and Bridges (q.v.), and even Tennyson did, trying to destroy accent. This you simply cannot do without turning your verse into a sort of quaint prose. If Williams' pronouncements on Thomas Campion are embarrassing, his poems do achieve a kind of musicality, and a new musicality at that, which many others of this century lack.

It is appropriate at this point to deal with a movement in which Williams played a major part. Objectivism never hit any headlines, even though Pound (q.v.) was officially associated with it, and besides Williams only one other 'objectivist' has since become at all well known: Louis Zukofsky (q.v.). But this small group is important both as a refinement of imagism (q.v.), and as a forerunner of a branch of American poetry exemplified in the work of Robert Duncan, Robert Creeley, Gary Snyder (qq.v.) and many others, which flourished in the Sixties and Seventies, and is only just beginning to peter out. It began when a wealthy young man (the description is Williams'), George Oppen (q.v.), decided to lose his money on publishing poetry. At first his press was called TO ('The

Objectivists'), and in 1932 it published *An "Objectivists" Anthology*, edited by Zukofsky. Then it became the Objectivist Press, with an advisory board consisting of Williams, Zukofsky and Pound; other poets involved included Carl Rakosi (ps. Callman Rawley), born in Berlin, and Charles Reznikoff, a lawyer born in New York (qq.v.). Acknowledging Williams as their master, these poets (this does not include Pound, whose relationship was avuncular and postal) published his *Collected Poems 1921–1931* (1934), with an introduction by Wallace Stevens (q.v.). But their own work has its importance in twentieth-century American poets' search for simplicity. All, though minor poets and content to be so, possess an integrity and a lack of interest in personal fame – as distinct from poetic achievement – that could be a lesson to their modern successors. There is much in the claim that while the American poetic tradition appeared to be, during the Thirties, in the hands of such as Tate and Ransom (qq.v.), it was really in the hands of these relatively obscure poets. Where it is most feeble is in its lack of emotional robustness and its relentless concentration on the trivialities of everyday existence – a kind of egotism. Only Whitman avoided this. That this tradition, stemming directly from Whitman and running through Sandburg and Williams to Creeley and others, has not yet produced a truly major poet since its originator does not constitute a negation of the claim, though American poetry is unlikely to produce this kind of poet from philistine roots.

The objectivists were agreed that imagism, having helped to get rid of mere verbiage, had 'dribbled off into so much free verse. . . . There is no such thing as free verse! Verse is measure of some sort . . . we argued, the poem . . . is an object . . . that in itself formally presents its case and its meaning by the very form it assumes . . . it must be the purpose of the poet to make of his words a new form: to invent, that is, an object consonant with his day . . .' (Williams). These words bear heeding, because they sum the credo of every kind of disciple of Williams.

**Louis Zukofsky** (1904–78) was a quiet, unassertive man who has been possibly the most persistent and courageous experimentalist in the English-speaking world in this century. Once again, it is his procedures that are important – as indeed one might expect in a work that 'in itself formally presents its case and its meaning by the very form it assumes. . . .' To the reader nourished on conventional pap Zukofsky's poetry and criticism seem thin and insubstantial; nor indeed does he display anything of the emotional robustness of a Williams (q.v.). But this should not distract attention from the significance of what he did. It is characteristic of Zukofsky that his chief work, the long poem – unfinished – *A*, should be continuous, a day book. For Zukofsky it is absurd to be a good poet at one point of one's life, then a bad one, and so on. So *A* is his continuous poetic reaction, as often concerned with sounds as with music. He reminds us of Gertrude Stein (q.v.) at least inasmuch as meaning in his verse is very often no more than an overtone to sound. (All the objectivists shared Gertrude Stein's notion of words as words, things-in-themselves.) Zukofsky is continually playful, and yet he is always thinking – if in a somewhat primitivistic (and why not?) sense of the word – very closely indeed about words as meaning and words as sound. The context of his work is almost always his domestic life; his wife and son Paul (now a well-known violinist) are both musicians. The theme of *A*, in fact, is marriage: marriage as a bastion against the ruins of 'civilization'. For poets at least it is always readable, always an evocation of a sweetly lived life. Some clues to the passages that look like nonsense, but which are in fact various sorts of experiments with sound, may be gathered from Zukofsky and his wife Celia's *Catullus* (1969), in which they have transliterated the entire works of Catullus from Latin into an American that 'tries . . . to breathe the "literal" meaning with him'. Thus the famous:

Odi et amo. quare id faciam, fortasse requiris.  
nescio, sed fieri sentio et excrucior

becomes:

O th' hate I move love. Quarry it fact I am, for that's so re queries.  
Nescience, say th' fiery scent I owe whets crookeder.

Now: can the texture of the sound of Latin be woven into that of American? Apart from one or two remarkable *tours de force*, it seems not. The vast majority, however well disposed, would consider the above transliteration, for example, a grotesque failure: not only in terms of the literal Latin meaning but also in those of the American language. But it is the failure of an intelligent man; and the experiment is not a useless or a foolish one. However, the question that wholehearted partisans of this version of Catullus (few of whom, curiously, seem to possess the Zukofskys' knowledge of Latin) need to answer is: what can be the function of such a language as is here invented? What is interesting is that an answer can be made. Just as some sense can be made of Williams' 'theory' of prosody so even 'O th' hate I move love' for 'Odi et amo' can be defended. We must consider it – and Zukofsky, even if we find against him. The poems have been collected in *All: The Collected Shorter Poems 1923–1958* (1966), *All: The Collected Shorter Poems 1956–1964* (1967), "A" 1–12 (1967), "A" 13–21 (1969). Criticism is in *Prepositions* (1967), and fiction (a useful method of approach to this important poet) in *Ferdinand* (1968). *Bottom: on Shakespeare* (1963) is criticism combining poetic and musical interests.

Carl Rakosi (1903), a social worker and psychotherapist, and always involved in social protest from a position well left of the usual American liberalism, is the least well known or committed of the objectivists, but his poetry is as clean as it is slight; *Selected Poems* appeared in 1941, *Amulet* in 1967, and *My Experiences in Parnassus* in 1977.

George Oppen (1908) is more substantial. *Materials* (1962) collects thirty years of his work, and he has published three collections since then. He has been described, in terms characteristic of recent criticism, as being 'one of the best and one of the worst of poets'. He has been important to some of the Black Mountain poets (q.v.) because his project has been to express his existence and the use he has made of it:

Yet I am one of those who from nothing but man's way of  
thought and one of his dialects and what has happened to me  
have made poetry

Oppen, unlike Zukofsky and Olson (qq.v.), has not received even belated critical recognition, despite his Pulitzer Prize of 1969. And yet his understanding of the problems of diction has been as acute as Williams' (q.v.), and since his first book appeared in 1934 he has provided an object-lesson: a poetry that 'presents its case . . . by the very form it assumes'. Like Zukofsky, he aims for a full articulation of his engagement with life; he is fascinated, too, with objects-as-themselves (cf., again, the *nouveau roman*), objects not anthropomorphized. But his method is complex; cutting across his purely objectivist preoccupations are intellectual and abstract concerns that might contort the face (often the Black Mountain equivalent of raising the eyebrow) of a true disciple of Williams. Sometimes he has been guilty of smuggling thought into his poetry, in such lines as those describing women in the stree:is 'weakened by too much need/Of too little'; and yet careful study of his poetry shows that he, more than any other poet in his tradition, has seen the possibilities of using content to create its own form. He is not trivial, and his

methods are more original than some of his admirers think. *Collected Poems 1929–1975* (1975); *Primitive* (1978).

Charles Reznikoff (1894–1980), a considerably older man, wrote distinguished prose in his novel *By the Waters of Manhattan* (1930), and in *Family Chronicle* (1963); as a poet he was more of an imagist:

This smoky morning –  
do not despise the green jewel shining among the twigs  
because it is a traffic light.

His poetry, much of which is collected in *By the Waters of Manhattan: Selected Verse* (1962), is as enjoyable (in the full sense of the word) as any imagist's could possibly be. Though evidently sometimes impelled to widen his scope, he chose to limit himself to the minimal, with, in this case, excellent results. Reznikoff was not, like Oppen (q.v.), a pioneer; but because he decided to narrow his scope, his picture-making impulses were not frustrated, and many of his poems have the freshness of such paintings as 'Early Sunday Morning' by Edward Hopper, with whom he has indeed been compared.

Ezra Pound's (1885–1972) part in the new American poetry has been more cosmopolitan. No writer of the twentieth century has had more personal influence on modern literature, or has known and encouraged more individual poets. His importance in connection with imagism (q.v.), vorticism, W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot, William Carlos Williams (qq.v.) and other men and movements has been or will be noted. His immense historical importance has never been in question; the matter of his individual achievement is very much more controversial.

Pound was born in Idaho. He began to attend the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, at the age of fifteen, owing to his good Latin. Here he met William Carlos Williams, then a student in dentistry. After two years he transferred to Hamilton College in New York State. By 1906, when he received his M.A., he had for some time been experimenting with various forms of verse. He had also already begun to develop the eccentric behaviour – a mixture, it seems, of exhibitionism, excitability, devotedness to his in many ways rather vague ideals and something that looks like hypomania – that was to characterize his life, and eventually lead him to incarceration in a mental hospital for thirteen years. By that time he had become ill: manic-depressive. After a short time spent in an academic job, for which he was totally unsuitable, Pound left for Europe. He published his first book of poems, *A Lume Spento* (1908; reprinted as *A Lume Spento and Other Early Poems*, 1965 – with a note by Pound addressed to William Carlos Williams referring to it as 'A collection of stale cream puffs ... why a reprint? No lessons to be learned save the depth of ignorance ...'). Soon afterwards he arrived in England and, with typical effrontery, 'took over' T.E. Hulme's (q.v.) and Henry Simpson's 'Poets' Club' of 1909 and turned it into the imagist group. In 1914 T.S. Eliot (q.v.) called on him in London; his poetry immediately aroused Pound's enthusiasm. Before this he had met Yeats (q.v.), and the Irish poet was to acknowledge his influence.

Pound was active on the English literary scene until after the end of the First World War. He helped, encouraged and publicized the work of James Joyce (q.v.), Wyndham Lewis (q.v.) and many others, a few of whom are still almost unknown today. Pound has never bothered much about reputation, and has frequently treated his own simply as a means of helping other writers' work to become recognized. In this sense he has been the most generous poet of the century. He began writing his (unfinished) *Cantos* in 1915, but had been planning them for some time before that. The first collection, *A Draft of XXX Cantos*, was published in Paris in 1930 (Pound's *Cantos* are now available as follows: *The*

*Cantos of Ezra Pound*, 1957; *Thrones: 96–109 de los Cantares*, 1959; *Drafts and Fragments of Cantos CX–CXVII*, 1970). He lived in France and then in Italy until his arrest at the end of the Second World War.

In 1918 Pound met Major C.H. Douglas, who had devised an economic scheme called Social Credit, which, he claimed, could avert economic depressions. Pound very soon became taken up with these ideas; he was convinced that in monetary reform lay the key to the creation of a society in which perfect beauty and perfect justice would co-exist. Previously his views on art and society had been less unusual: the writer was to be valued by the degree of his clarity and precision (compare the programme of imagism); of society and social systems Pound was contemptuous – only the individual deserved respect.

Douglas' ideas have never been taken seriously by economists – not necessarily an indictment of them, but perhaps of their originator's sense of tact – but they have had some influence on minority politics in Canada and elsewhere. Douglas himself was not a fascist, and he did not see his theories as being implemented either in Mussolini's Italy or in Hitler's Germany. Pound, unhappily, despite his later confused denial that he had ever been 'for Fascism', was deluded into thinking that Italy's fascist government was leading the country in the cultural direction he found desirable. Yet he knew little about contemporary Italian literature. His anti-semitism, never personal, now began to flare up dangerously; it became increasingly distasteful as the Nazi attitude towards the Jews became clearer. Pound gradually came to see all wars and social misery as a conspiracy of 'top' Jews, based in usury. Markedly greater than his anguish at the unhappiness caused to ordinary people by wars and poverty, however, was his own frustrated rage at not getting his ideas accepted. An element of grandiosity entered his calculations – or projects, as they had better be called – even as his anti-semitic language became more abrasively insulting (and puerile); he thought seriously of gaining the ear of American government officials, and at the same time developed a violent dislike of President Roosevelt. He did have some doubts about fascism, and on occasions he even tried to be fair, in his own terms, about the Jews; but more attracted him in fascism than did not, and he was clearly ideologically committed to it by the late Thirties. There was certainly a paranoid element in this commitment, though this seems only to have co-existed with, not to have been fuelled by, his mental instability and varying affect. His thoughts and utterances were a fantastic ragbag of theories both wild and sane, and indignations just and unjust. He seems to have had not the faintest idea what the war of 1939 was really about: he told the popular novelist and Nobel prizewinner Pearl Buck that it was 'mainly for moneylending and three or four metal monopolies'. When America entered the war Pound made an effort to leave Italy, but was prevented from doing so. It is likely that he found it hard to make decisions.

It is clear that Pound's mind began to cloud, seriously, from the beginning of the Thirties – although a tendency to retreat into a position from which reality was inaccessible had been apparent since early youth. In 1933 he gained an audience with Mussolini, the only one he was ever to have, and came away with the delusion – amazing in anyone of his intelligence – that the dictator really cared for poetry and beauty, and was working passionately for a just society. Pound even thought, from a polite remark, that Mussolini had read and understood the *Cantos*.

It is evident that throughout the war years Pound was in a state of considerable distress. He had been taking small sums of money – which he needed – for broadcasts from Rome radio since before the American declaration of war. He continued to do so after it. The broadcasts were rambling, ill-delivered, dense and perhaps technically treasonable. They had no adverse effect on anyone on the Allied side: since they were

almost always on the subject of economics or literature, very few could have understood them. His wife could not follow them for the same reason that some of his readers cannot follow his poems: because of the abrupt jumps from one subject to another. These radio talks were clearly the work of a man at the verge of, or perhaps at times immersed in, insanity.

At the end of the war Pound was eventually arrested and sent to the Disciplinary Training Camp at Pisa. Here he suffered exceedingly, at one point collapsing into a state of 'violent and hysterical terror'. But he recovered sufficiently to write the continuation of his *Cantos*, called *The Pisan Cantos*, and published as such (1948). Brought back to America to face treason charges in 1945, he was correctly judged to be unfit to plead, and was confined to St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington. His state at this time was worse than it had ever been: symptoms included scattered wits, inability to concentrate, and an insistence that his new versions of Confucius were the only rational foundation upon which to build a new world. He maintained throughout that he had not committed treason; it was plain that the matter had worried his conscience at all times.

Released (after too long) in 1958, Pound went back to Italy, where he died. He suffered from periodic depressions, and was never wholly coherent. He said on several occasions that he had 'botched' his life work, and made 'errors'; but he continued to publish fragments of poetry. The *Cantos* remained unfinished.

Pound had of course aroused great controversy. This reached its height when he had not long been in St. Elizabeth's, and was awarded the Bollingen Prize for *The Pisan Cantos*. Since many of his disciples then appeared to share his political views, it was natural that his detractors, however unfairly, should identify his poetry with those views – with, in fact, a virulent brand of anti-semitic fascism. One of these erstwhile disciples, Pound's best biographer (*The Life of Ezra Pound*, 1970), Noel Stock, has put all this into a proper perspective. 'I will not dwell on the rubbish which we, his correspondents, fed to him [in St. Elizabeth's], or the rubbish which he in turn fed to us . . . a good number of us . . . helped to confirm him in the belief that he alone possessed a coherent view of the truth. . . .'

The fact is that Pound's political views, such as he has expressed them, would not do credit to a sixth-former. They were partly inherited from the American populism of the Nineties of Pound's childhood, a movement that originated in poverty and was quickly dissipated by a return to prosperity. Like all populism, Pound's is characterized by a practicality (he had been a good handyman all his life), a love of folk poetry, a genuine love of and feeling for the very poor and a cluster of negative attitudes: ill-informedly anti-capitalistic, anti-legal, anti-semitic and (tragically and confusedly in this case) anti-intellectual. Certainly the brilliance of some of Pound's insights has been vitiated by his evident insensitivity to human suffering (e.g. the suffering going on around him in Italy during the war) and his increasing tendency towards incoherence. Fortunately this is only half the story.

Pound's first book to attract wide attention, *Personae* (1909), was attacked both for being incomprehensibly 'modern' and for being absurdly archaic. Much of the modernism was actually Browning put into a distinctly new rhythm. Here Pound writes of a down-at-heel old scholar (these lines, from 'Famam Librosque Cano', come originally from *A Lume Spento*):

Such an one picking a ragged  
Backless copy from the stall,  
Too cheap for cataloguing,  
Loquitur,

'Ah - eh! the strange rare name . . .  
 Ah - eh. He must be rare if even *I* have not . . .'  
 And lost mid-page  
 Such age  
 As his pardons the habit,  
 He analyzes form and thought to see  
 How I 'scaped immortality.

But where Pound was already most original was in his method. He adapted from the Provençal, mixed archaism with modern slang, resurrected (to adapt his own words from his *Credo*) forgotten modes because he found 'some leaven' in them, and because he saw in them an element that was lacking in the poetry of his own time 'which might unite' it 'again to its sustenance, life'. The programme was impeccable - but always missing was any robustness of his own: there is never a core that is individual.

In the succeeding years Pound produced more books of short poems, and a brilliant adaptation (complete with presumably deliberate howlers, such as a rendering of the Latin 'vates' as 'votes') of the poems of Sextus Propertius called *Homage to Sextus Propertius* (1934; written 1917-18). *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920), a group of poems originally prompted by the correct conviction that the free verse movement had 'gone too far', was written just afterwards. For those critics who see the *Cantos* as a failure not substantially relieved by excellent or beautiful passages, these two works represent the height of Pound's achievement. Free verse has probably never been handled more firmly or effectively in English than in *Homage to Sextus Propertius*, which, like *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, has a coherence that Pound never found again. 'Mr Nixon' is as acid and yet serenely good-mannered a satire against literary opportunism, commercialism and lack of integrity as the twentieth century has seen; and the famous 'Envoi' (1919) that Pound offers as his own poetic credo is as beautiful as anything he has ever written:

Go, dumb-born book,  
 Tell her that sang me once that song of Lawes:  
 Hadst thou but song  
 As thou hast subjects known,  
 Then were there cause in thee that should condone  
 Even my faults that heavy upon me lie,  
 And build her glories their longevity.

Tell her that sheds  
 Such treasure in the air,  
 Recking naught else but that her graces give  
 Life to the moment,  
 I would bid them live  
 As roses might, in magic amber laid,  
 Red overwrought with orange and all made  
 One substance and one colour  
 Braving time.

Tell her that goes  
 With song upon her lips  
 But sings not out the song, nor knows  
 The maker of it, some other mouth,

May be as fair as hers,  
 Might, in new ages, gain her worshippers,  
 When our two dusts with Waller's shall be laid,  
 Siftings on siftings in oblivion  
 Till change hath broken down  
 All things save beauty alone.

And yet even in this poem, as good as anything ever written by Pound, we may see his limitations. 'Beauty' is still sensed as itself something of a generalization. There is nothing in Pound's poetry about human behaviour as such: no psychological hint as to what beauty itself might consist of, either behaviouristically or in understandable, human terms. The beauty in Pound's verse is nearly always elusive in its nature. Furthermore, utterly convincing as this is, it is pastiche: it is not Pound's own voice, and the rhythms are not his own.

Pound had previously defined the image as 'an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. . . . It is the presentation of such an image which gives that sudden sense of liberation; that sense of freedom from time and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in . . . the greatest works of art'. His own participation in the imagist movement had really been only a dramatization of his own developing programme; and yet, like Reznikoff (q.v.), but on an infinitely grander scale, he was to remain an 'imagist' all his life. That is what he is best at.

Pound first learned about Japanese poetry from F. S. Flint (q.v.), but he soon took over as the pioneer in the study of it. In fact, although he did not understand the Japanese language, he understood some of the more important qualities of Japanese poetry long before they were fully explained to Western readers. It is in this understanding, and the use he made of it, that his greatest achievement lies. His famous poem 'In a Station of the Metro',

The apparition of these faces in a crowd;  
 Petals on a wet, black bough

perfectly illustrates his discovery: a straightforward non-metaphorical statement is followed by a striking image, in the manner of the Japanese *haiku* (q.v.). In this 'superpositional' method one idea 'is set on top of another'. The beauty and the meaning of the poem are to be discovered in the imaginative leap necessary from the statement to the metaphor for it. But perhaps almost tragically, it is not a substantial poem: it is rather a building block from which a substantial one might be made. When Pound came to construct the *Cantos*, the whole edifice failed (as he said) to cohere: it was a series of images strung onto a prose string. In a slightly longer poem, 'Coitus', Pound employs essentially the same method to describe a well-known experience:

The gilded phaloi of the crocuses  
 are thrusting at the spring air.  
 Here is there naught of dead gods  
 But a procession of festival,  
 A procession, O Giulio Romano,  
 Fit for your spirit to dwell in.  
 Dione, your nights are upon us.

The dew is upon the leaf.  
 The night about us is restless.

Pound's inspiration here was Japanese – specifically the Japanese *haiku*. Now this is essentially a miniature art – one that the modern Japanese poets have themselves found largely inadequate. Pound's genius perceived its possibilities for English verse, but nevertheless could not turn miniaturism into epic – which is, however, exactly what he tried to do in the *Cantos*. In the epic he hoped that his own unifying sensibility would successfully gather together all the fragmentarily presented poetries and cultures. Instead, the poem became a game for adepts, as Noel Stock has demonstrated (*Reading the Cantos*, 1967). As Stock says, they 'do not constitute a poem, but a disjointed series of short poems, passages, lines and fragments, often of exceptional beauty or interest, but uninformed, poetically or otherwise, by larger purpose'. They are, he insists, poetry – not poems. Although there are books, notably one by Donald Davie (*Ezra Pound: Poet as Sculptor*, 1964), which claim that the *Cantos* do possess a unifying purpose, these are not convincing, they have not on the whole convinced unintimidated readers (Davie is essentially a didactic bully, for all his insights), and it seems unlikely that the view they put forward will prevail. It is very difficult indeed to credit the epic poet Pound with a 'unifying sensibility' – as difficult as it is to credit the man with one; and there is, after all, his own recent view of the poem, which cannot altogether be attributed to senile depression: 'I picked out this and that thing that interested me, and then jumbled them into a bag. But that's not the way to make a *work of art*.' As Santayana (q.v.) put it to Pound in a letter in 1940: '... Your tendency to jump is so irresistible that the bond between the particulars jumped to is not always apparent'; and he himself, in Canto CXVI, has confessed: 'I cannot make it cohere'. It is both ironic and significant that Pound's greatest triumphs and failures should consist of 'leaps'. In the *Cantos* the leaps too often become impenetrable ellipses. Pound's admiration for earlier and successful epics such as the *Divine Comedy* misled him into believing that they could be written today. They cannot.

In Pound mental instability has certainly vitiated poetic achievement. His imagery of beauty and its permanence, and of light, is often strangely beautiful; but even his achievement here may ultimately be seen to have been vitiated by a lack of emotional solidity, an absence of wisdom, reflecting an inability to learn through experience. Probably his reputation has been unduly inflated, and he has certainly attracted a large number of inferior cranks.

But Pound stood notably, if never very diplomatically or tactfully, for poetic values against commercial ones; he was generous and perceptive; and he searched, as well as his wrecked mind would allow him, for the truth. Posterity may dub him a minor poet: minor because even in his best poetry he lacks solid conviction; but he will be called a vital critic (sometimes in his poetry), and the failure of his mind will always be regarded as tragic.

The novelist and poet H.D. (ps. Hilda Doolittle, 1886–1961), born in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, went to Europe in 1911, was for a time married to the English writer Richard Aldington (q.v.) and was associated with the imagists in England; but she remained essentially an American poet in her attitudes and her use of the short line. Like Williams (q.v.), she was much influenced by the hard precision of Greek poetry. But her Greek was better than Williams', and she was a poet of more substance. Read by almost every poet of the century and recognized by them as an exquisite minor, H.D. has been extraordinarily neglected by critics. Her translation of Euripides' *Ion* (1937) is probably the best translation from Greek drama of the century – only MacNeice's (q.v.) *Agamemnon* can rival it – if faithfulness to the text be taken into consideration. H.D.'s gift, slight but tempered, survived: alone of those imagists who did not merely travel through the movement, she continued to write well. Her earlier poems subscribed exactly to the imagist programme; but she differed from the other imagists, such as her husband Richard

Aldington, in that the manner was natural to her. She did not come to imagism; imagism came to her. Her style rigidly excludes sentimentalities, and concentrates on producing objects (poems) that do not pretend to evoke, but instead present themselves as themselves. Her poems have a dateless quality, which calls attention not only to their strength but also to her general weakness: commonplace emotion may be subsumed in 'classical' style, as such lines as:

your insight  
has driven deeper  
than the lordliest tome  
of Attic thought  
or Cyrenian logic

hint. Except at their very best, there is in her poems always an element of pastiche of late Greek classical poetry that raises suspicion. This suspicion is partly confirmed by the trilogy she wrote during the Second World War: *The Walls Do Not Fall* (1944), *Tribute to the Angels* (1945) and *Flowering of the Rod* (1946), which dealt with themes of war. In style and taste this is an impressive work; but the symbolism and thought behind it are tawdry by comparison. When H. D.'s poetry is not at its best the manner conceals this; when she is at her best the manner itself is, becomes, the poem. She wrote a number of novels, including an extremely interesting and valuable *roman a clef*, *Bid Me To Live* (1960), about London in 1917. This contains a portrait of D. H. Lawrence (q.v.). Her best book, though, is *Tribute to Freud* (1956 rev. 1974), about herself and her experiences with Freud.

**Marianne Moore** (1887–1972), who was born at St. Louis, Missouri, has been praised and loved by poets of every persuasion. It was H. D. (q.v.) and the English novelist Bryher who, unknown to the author, published her first book, *Poems* (1921), which collected twenty-four poems that had appeared in periodicals. She was editor of the magazine *The Dial* from 1925 until its demise in 1929. Hers is a reputation that has never suffered vicissitudes.

Marianne Moore's *Complete Poems* were issued in 1968, but one also needs her *Collected Poems* (1961), and her earlier volumes: her alterations are revealing. She is unique in that she alone has made a 'modern' (by means of procedures) poetry out of an experience that deliberately excludes that rawness which we associate with the modern. There is absolutely nothing of the 'redskin' (q.v.) about her. She cut, in her eighty-first year, the twenty-odd lines of her famous poem 'Poetry' to just this:

I, too, dislike it.  
Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one discovers in  
it, after all, a place for the genuine.

The end of the original version, which includes the celebrated lines about 'imaginary gardens with real toads in them' (it is the real toads she eschews), runs:

... if you demand on the one hand  
the raw material of poetry in  
all its rawness and  
that which is on the other hand  
genuine, you are interested in poetry.

Miss Moore really does dislike it; but she is interested in it, and in a thoroughgoing,

respectable manner that is not shared by many other poets. But that, of course, is not poetry at all – but criticism.

All this is not a mask. Miss Moore's external personality is what she presents it as: she is a Presbyterian (like her father) who approves of Bible classes. Hart Crane (q.v.) called her 'the Rt. Rev. Miss Mountjoy', and protested 'What strange people these – [the omission is by the editor of Crane's letters] are. Always in a flutter for fear bowels will be mentioned. ...' This aspect of Marianne Moore must, I think, be faced up to. And Crane's verdict is the right one: 'She is so prosaic that the extremity of her detachment touches, or seems to touch, a kind of inspiration'. This is the shrewdest remark ever made about her poetry, which is indeed about rejecting almost everything in modern experience – but rejecting it without loss of grace or authenticity. Out of a sensibility applied to a world she rejects she has created a genuinely poetic style, a body of work that confers vitality and meaning upon a propriety that we might otherwise reject as either incredible (in a poet) or absurdly provincial.

Her most sustained and exact and, in its way, confessional poem is 'The Pangolin'. This has been taken as a description of an animal so precise and loving that its object becomes a paradigm of a certain kind of human virtue. But it is both more and less than this. For here she describes her own life-style. And in the gentleness of the poem there is an implied rejection of an ungentle world:

to explain grace requires  
a curious hand. If that which is at all  
were not forever,  
why would those who graced the spires  
with animals ...  
have slaved to confuse  
grace with a kindly manner, time in  
which to pay a debt  
the cure for sins ...?

In Marianne Moore's poetry the disliked 'poetry', the peerless, imaginative thing that she sees she must reject, is relentlessly eschewed by a technique that makes enjambement a rule and not an exception, and takes as often as not an almost cynical, mechanically syllabic pattern as its norm – and yet the poetry returns, as a gift, in the form of subtle rhythms and light rhymes, as delicately as a butterfly alighting.

**Wallace Stevens** (1879–1955), born in Pennsylvania, was admired by Williams (q.v.), but is on the whole eschewed by the 'native American' school; academic critics and poets, however, have taken him up. Stevens is not only modern in appearance – recondite, wanton in his imagery, holding back explicitness – but in substance as well. Thus two of his best-known lines are (and they are atrocious): 'The poem is the cry of its occasion/Part of the res itself and not about it'. He wasted much of his gift in meandering, ineffectual poetry ('The Man with the Blue Guitar') that is little more than an appropriate screen for the projections of ingenious critics; he needs rigorous selection; but at his second-best he is delightful, and at his rare best, superb. His first book, *Harmonium*, appeared in 1923 when he was nearly forty-four, and, unusually, he wrote the bulk of his poetry after he was fifty. He was at Harvard, then read law, and then joined the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company in 1916; in 1934 he became its vice-president, a position which he held until his death. He was, then, a full-time business man for the whole of his life. This is often remarked upon. Perhaps the only relevant comment is that he is the only poet of the century, of comparable stature, thus to combine business with

poetry; and that this is a formidable undertaking simply because the values of insurance and those of poetry do not appear to mix too easily.

Stevens' manner is polished, aesthetic, literary, exotic – at its worst whimsical and contrived – logical and rhetorical. In terms of feeling his poetry is thin and deliberately reticent: that kind of experience is not its subject. Stevens is above all a civilized poet; his project is usually taken to be philosophical, but it can also be described as a search for a style, an answer to the question, 'How can an insurance man also be a poet?' 'What! Wally a poet', one of his illiterate colleagues exclaimed when told of it. The usual critical approach is to grant that there is what Professor Frank Kermode calls a 'poetry of abstraction', and to judge Stevens as a master of it. However, Stevens is at his best when he is being non-abstract – even if about the pains and difficulties of trying to maintain abstractness. The whimsical, recondite surface of the inferior poems is not always as masterly as it appears. As Stevens told his future wife when he was a very young man: 'Perhaps I do like to be sentimental now and then in a roundabout way. . . . I certainly do dislike expressing it right and left'. Thus 'The Man with the Blue Guitar' conceals not feeling but sentimentality beneath its artful veneer of vaguely symbolist preciousness; the complex aesthetic philosophy it contains may provide grist for such interesting neo-scholiasts as Professor Frank Kermode (a fine if contentious expositor of Stevens), but poetically this is neither here nor there. Too often Stevens was practising: a business man who, instead of questioning the moral sources of his affluence, played scales on an old chocolate bassoon (as he might have put it). Kermode says: 'There is a poetry of the abstract; if you do not like it, even when it is firmly rooted in the particulars of the world, you will not like Stevens'. It is not quite as simple as that. One may dislike or not accept as valid the existence of 'a poetry of the abstract', but one may still like a little of Stevens. The trouble with 'The Man with the Blue Guitar' is that it is wholly cerebral: there is nothing to anchor it to any sort of emotional particular. 'Owl Clover', a longish poem rightly omitted from the *Collected Poems* (1954) but restored in its original version in *Opus Posthumous* (1957), shows him to least advantage: not because it maintains a poet's right to pursue his function despite politics, but because its view of Marxism, for all the sonorities, is as vulgar and insensitive and ignorant as one might expect from an insurance man (no more than an 'it', in E. E. Cummings', q.v., words, 'that stinks excuse me'). But William York Tindall has reminded us that Stevens was a 'Taft Republican who thought Eisenhower a dangerous radical', and in a poet of his sensibilities what is 'fine and private . . . heroic . . . the romance of lost causes finds its happiest concentration here'. However, Stevens skated on thin ice; we have good reason to suspect his aestheticism – if we are among those who do not believe the possession of genius is an excuse for lack of sensibility. 'Owl Clover' is crass reactionary propaganda from a man who never visited Europe in his life, and knew nothing of it at first hand – as bad as crass communist propaganda or tractor doggerel, and perhaps worse because wrapped up in an aestheticism that looks so advanced. (Stevens once wrote in a letter: 'The Italians have as much right to take Ethiopia from the coons as the coons had to take it from the boa-constrictors'; he then nervously qualified this by saying his own sympathy was with the coons and the boa-constrictors – but finally stated that Mussolini was 'right, practically'. This is worse than Pirandello, q.v.: it has not even cynicism or guilt in it, it is selfish and obtuse.)

Still, that is enough said. If he kept off politics, especially the kind that threatened his good living and his picture collecting (he believed, and wrongly, that people who could afford to buy pictures were better judges of them than those who could only talk about them), he was, after all, subversive: his early poetry, with its new words and gaiety, deliberately sought to annoy. 'The Emperor of Ice Cream' (equally, 'The Emperor of "I

Scream”’) analyses its material into its Freudian components in spite of himself.

Stevens’ first inspiration may well have been Moody (q.v.); at all events, those poems (his juvenilia), he said, ‘gave him the creeps’. The sources for his mature manner were mostly French, and perhaps his greatest debt was to Léon-Paul Fargue (q.v.), whom he sometimes resembles quite closely. His American forebears were inferior poets: **Donald Evans** (1884–1921), a now forgotten Greenwich Village decadent who killed himself, and **Alfred Kreymborg** (1883–1969), a lesser imagist and a friend of Stevens’, from whom he may have gathered some more general hints. Lacking (or eschewing) a central core of experience that compelled poems from him, Stevens’ chief theme is the supremacy of the creative imagination. Like Robbe-Grillet (q.v.), Stevens sees order, form, as coming only from the creators of imaginary worlds. For all his sophistication he is, as Maurius Bewley has observed, a romantic, who believes in the transmuting powers of the imagination. This faith is most succinctly defined in the sequence called ‘Notes Towards a Supreme Fiction’, which some would put amongst his best poems. However, ‘Sunday Morning’ and the subtly autobiographical ‘Le Monocle de Mon Oncle’, both early poems, have the feeling this often verbally beautiful, but over-cerebral sequence lacks. In both, Stevens’ manner functions as vitality, but is subdued by personal concerns rather than philosophizings. Nothing touches the note of such lines as the beautiful ‘but until now I never knew/That fluttering things have so distinct a shade’ or ‘We live in an old chaos of the sun’ until the serene final poems, when the threat of death edged safe business and prime capitalist living out of the foreground:

Ariel was glad he had written his poems.  
They were of a remembered time  
Or of something seen that he liked.

It has been claimed that Stevens is the most important poet of the first half of the century with the ‘possible’ exceptions of Eliot, Pound and Frost (qq.v.): ‘There are no other serious competitors’. This, it seems, is to put philosophy above poetry. Williams’ poetry is surely much more ‘important’, though it is to be granted that it is nothing like as rewarding; and Ransom’s (q.v.) achievement in individual poems is as great or greater. But to exegetic critics, it is true, Stevens offers most of all; ironically, it is his best work, mostly in *Harmonium*, that most strongly resists such attentions. Stevens did have an emotional life, but could not face up to its implications; but by not thinking about it he produced some sort of record of it. His inferior, pseudo-philosophical poetry, the ‘abstract’ stuff which excited some critics, did provide him with a means of keeping in practice.

**E. E. Cummings** (1894–1962), born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, is still regarded by some as a ‘modern’ poet. But he was a quirky traditionalist in all respects save two: he showed that typography – visual variations – could be useful; and his ear for the vernacular was sometimes, though not always, good. There are two Cummings: a versifier who disguises his sentimentalities and sometimes irregular but always conventional metrics by typographical tricks; and a magnificently aggressive comic and satirical poet who – alas – never quite grew up. Cummings had wanted to be a painter, and he did in fact execute strangely atrocious paintings all his life (his sense of colour can only be described as horrible). Instead of maturing he surrendered to – as his photographs and self-portrait show – self-love and arrogance: his language lost its edge, and he descended increasingly into the cliché from which his love poetry had never been wholly free. No amount of critical interpretation can disguise the tawdry third-rateness of the language in the following poem (drawn from Cummings’ later work):

now all the fingers of this tree (darling) have  
hands, and all the hands have people; and  
more each particular person is (my love)  
alive than every world can understand

and now you are and i am now and we're  
a mystery which will never happen again,  
a miracle which has never happened before –  
and shining this our now must come to then

our then shall be some darkness during which  
fingers are without hands; and i have no  
you: and all trees are (any more than each  
leafless) its silent in forevering snow

– but never fear (my own, my beautiful  
my blossoming) for also then's until

This is the work of a man who has gone soft at the centre and likes himself too much to be able to see it. (Of course, at a private level it is perfectly acceptable – no one's business; but that is the trouble.) And yet he had once been very good indeed; more, I think, than the 'slight and charming' which has been allowed by him by his detractors. He had been able to criticize false patriotism and outworn literary language to admirable effect in such poems as 'come, gaze with me upon this dome'. Cummings has always been enormous fun, and, if one sounds a dissenting note, it is only because during his lifetime he had too much attention as a serious lyrical poet. He certainly deserves respect for his part in dismantling the genteel tradition. But diligent search fails to produce a single completely effective love poem: every one is marred by tentativeness or portentousness if not by that unquestioning sentimentality that is so odd in so fierce a satirist. The early poems are full of promise, but it was a promise that did not fully materialize. Cummings' originally childlike whimsicality and tweeness ('the little/lame balloon man'; 'hist whist/little ghost-things' – and so on) need not have been offensive; but he came to indulge it and, eventually, to confuse it with lyricism. The early love poems contain hints of a manner that Cummings might have developed, but most of them only conceal, by their eccentricity – which is of course often typographical – Cummings' failure to find a language. An exception is the fifth of the 'Songs' in *Tulips & Chimneys*: 'Doll's boy's asleep', in which a nursery rhyme insouciance is transformed into a note of genuine menace. But Cummings chose not to investigate the menace in his sexual emotions – he chose to avoid the crux of sexuality – and his best energies went into a satire that can be piercingly accurate, or merely hilarious – or funny but curiously diminishing, uncompassionate and perhaps insensitive. There are many poems like the one ending 'i try if you are a gentleman not to sense something un poco putrido/when we contemplate her uneyes safely ensconced in thick glass', and they are certainly funny; but there is an absence, elsewhere in Cummings' work, of a compensating pity: perhaps he imagined that the lyrics fill this role.

The fact is that for most of the time Cummings' gun is not quite good enough: not enough – the poet has been too keen to impress. If he does not diminish he patronizes. It has, however, been salutary to have someone like Cummings to ridicule and generally slam our philistine society of politicians and business men – and the pseudo-culture that nurses and sustains it. And then there are the splendid tough-guy poems, and the

descriptions of low life. Cummings is seldom as empathetic as Williams (q.v.) in his descriptions ('It really must/be Nice, never to', XIII from *Is 5*, is one of the fine exceptions), since he is concentrating on a kind of audience that Williams has rejected, but his immense gaiety and humour ('what's become of maeterlinck/now that april's here?') give him a unique importance. The oft-repeated judgement that he is 'the Catullus of the modern movement' is quite wrong; he is cheerfully and most enjoyably obscene (as in his car poem: 'she being Brand/-new; and you/know consequently a/little stiff I was/careful of her . . . just as we turned the corner of Divinity/avenue i touched the accelerator and give/her the juice, good . . .'), as Catullus is, but the Latin poet could never have indulged in Cummings' sentimentalities. We are grateful to Cummings; but the reservations have to be made. It is astonishing how many readers and critics take Cummings' late nineteenth-century, neo-romantic love poetry to be modern because of its careful but logical surface pyrotechnics. What has not yet been fully grasped is that Cummings' experiments are extensions of traditionalism, not reachings-forward.

Cummings went to France in the First World War as a volunteer ambulance driver; as a result of his violation of the French censorship laws in a letter home, he was arrested and spent some time in a French prison camp. *The Enormous Room* (1922) was the result, a classic of its kind – in which, incidentally, Cummings shows his capacity to master the vernacular. *Eimi* (1933), an account of a visit to Russia, is less good, but contains some memorable passages; in it, too, we see Cummings' romanticism at its strongest and least self-indulgent. *Complete Poems* (1968; expanded 1982) supersedes previous collections.

A rather more important, but less striking and less heeded writer, is **Conrad Aiken** (1889–1973), born in Savannah, Georgia. He has not yet had the thoroughgoing critical treatment he needs. Aiken is a distinguished novelist, critic and short-story writer as well as a poet. It is often said of him that he did not realize his enormous gifts. But this is to ignore too much: *Senlin* (1918), the *Preludes for Memnon* (1931) – his best poems, still undervalued – the novel *Great Circle* (1933), a number of short stories, the autobiographical *Ushant* (1953). The four main influences on Aiken have been: his physician father's killing of his mother and subsequent suicide (in 1900), music, Freud, and nineteenth-century romantic poetry (from Poe to Swinburne). This last debt makes him – in many ways a modernist – a very odd man out indeed. He combines a luxuriant style with a psychological subtlety that has not been fully appreciated. Famous for such finely simple poetry as 'Discordants' (from *Turns and Movies*, 1916):

Music I heard with you was more than music,  
And bread I broke with you was more than bread;  
Now that I am without you, all is desolate;  
All that was once so beautiful is dead.

Aiken can sustain such feeling in more complex poetry, as in the tragic Rilkean twentieth-century prelude, which begins:

What shall we do – what shall we think – what shall we say –?  
Why, as the crocus does, on a March morning,  
With just such shape and brightness; such fragility;  
Such white and gold, and out of just such earth.  
Or as the cloud does on the northeast wind –  
Fluent and formless; or as the tree that withers.

It takes much to maintain such pantheistic lyricism against the harsh sense of being human.

Aiken's weakness, despite his huge and unexcelled intellectual sophistication, is his romantic imitativeness; but at his best he has – as in the lines above – been able to find his own voice. He has been neglected because he has chosen to express himself, for the most part, in long poems or sequences, and these have simply not been explored. They should be. More than any other poet, he has wanted to allow the subconscious mind to speak for itself; but – paradoxically – he has organized the surface of his poetry most elaborately to that effect. This is to say that he has modified his bland lyrical flow only by such devices as have suggested themselves at the moment of composition; but the devices themselves are often complicated.

His short stories often deal poignantly with psychotic situations; more than any others, they are the stories of a poet. *Ushant* treats of the men he has known: it was he who showed Eliot's poems to Pound (q.v.); he who helped to orient Malcolm Lowry (q.v.) imaginatively, truthfully and yet with a tact that he may have learned during his long stay, between wars, in England. Of his novels, *Great Circle* (1933), a treatment of the catastrophe of his childhood, seems certain to be revived and admired. An 'essential Aiken', which would be a very fat volume, would contain some of the most unusual and rewarding writing of our time.

By contrast, **Robinson Jeffers** (1887–1962), though he has a few staunch admirers, seems unlikely to survive, perhaps because his extreme pessimism is uncompensated for by any linguistic energy. He was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; from 1924 he lived in a stone house and tower – in Carmel, California – which he built himself. His philosophy is not new, but is not in itself uninteresting: man's intellectual capacities are a terrible delusion and they disgrace him and lead him into trouble. Stone, the sea: these endure. Animals: these have dignity and no aspiration. But nothing whatever happens in Jeffers' language, which is cliché-ridden and more often than not suggests that he was by no means convinced of his own beliefs, which were perhaps formulated as a response to his father's theological certainties. He had some narrative gift, of an old-fashioned kind; but his poems and plays hardly bear re-reading. His *Collected Poems* was published in 1948.

**Louise Bogan** (1897–1970), whose *Collected Poems* (1954) shared the Bollingen Prize with Léonie Adams (q.v.), was best known for her poetry reviews in *The New Yorker*. She was skilful and precise, and did enough to win gallant accolades such as 'the most distinguished woman poet of our time' (Allen Tate); but she lacked attack, and nothing she wrote is memorable.

**Léonie Adams** (1899), born in Brooklyn, is a different matter. Not too well known in her own country, she remains unpublished and unknown in Great Britain. Yet she is a most distinguished and original poet. She has been called romantic, but wrongly: rather, she has preserved the metaphysical tradition in a romantic diction. Of a gull alighting without a feather being stirred she says,

So in an air less rare than longing might  
The dreams of flying lift a marble bird.

Her best poems are in *Poems: A Selection* (1954).

Both these poets are vastly superior to **Edna St. Vincent Millay** (1892–1950), who survives in Edmund Wilson's poignant memoir of her as a person, but hardly at all as a poet. Once very widely read, her proper place is beside Rupert Brooke (q.v.). A few of her lines have descriptive precision, but she left no single satisfactory poem. Her capacities are well illustrated by her lines: 'God! we could keep this planet warm/By friction, if the sun should fail'.

### III

The late nineteenth century in America was a time of highly effective, bewitching actors (Robert Mantell, William Gillette, Richard Mansfield, John Drew, Jr.), but of mediocre drama. Ibsen made a late impact, and the plays through which the Americans were introduced to realism now seem melodramatic as well as sentimental. The energetic actor-manager and dramatist **Steele MacKaye** (1842–94) developed stage machinery and lighting, and trained actors. He was, if mostly in what he aspired to, an important influence on the future American stage. But not as a playwright: his own plays were pioneer in subject (*Hazel Kirke*, 1880, is the most famous) but weak in structure and dialogue. Much of the work of the real pioneer in playwriting, **Bronson Howard** (1842–1908), does not now seem an improvement; but, although his primary purpose was always to entertain, he was one of the first to treat his material thoughtfully – and he did develop. He was also the first American to make his living by writing for the stage. The loose ends of *Young Mrs. Winthrop* (1899), first produced in 1882, are sentimentally tied up in the last act; but its situation is realistic. One who did not hinder – though he hardly helped – the emergence of a realistic theatre was **David Belasco** (1859–1931), who also wrote plays – Puccini’s opera is based on his *Girl of the Golden West* (1905). **Augustus Thomas** (1857–1934) was in the main simply a successful playwright, but he did have the serious purpose of showing the United States as it was, and he did help – with, for example, *As a Man Thinks* (1911), on faith healing – to clear the way for the ‘problem play’. Neither **Clyde Fitch** (1865–1909) nor **James A. Herne** (1839–1901) wrote what we should call a good play. But both contributed in a small way to a specifically American theatre. The former’s best plays were his study of a pathologically jealous woman, *The Girl with the Green Eyes* (1902), and *The City* (1909), which is one of the early stage attacks on political corruption. James A. Herne’s *Margaret Fleming* (1890), about adultery, is superior. It seems maudlin and artificial to us now, but its theme deeply shocked the audiences – for the adultery is forgiven. It was praised by Howells and Garland (qq.v.). It is unfortunate that all these men worked to create the star system as well as an American theatre, since the star system is in many ways one of the banes of the modern American (and British) theatre; but they had little alternative if they wanted to eat. However, by 1896, with the formation of the first Theatrical Syndicate, the days of the actor-managers were effectually at an end. Philistinism and commerce moved into the theatre: it was hardly to be wondered at that business men, seeing a potential source of profit, should move in. In the first two decades of the century philistinism was countered by the formation of groups who, in one way or another, managed to make themselves independent. Winthrop Ames (1871–1937) inherited a fortune from his father, who was a railway magnate, and made three gallant efforts to found true repertory in New York; later he built two theatres. More important was the equally non-commercial Theatre Guild (1919), which began as the Washington Square Players in 1914. And most important of all was the Provincetown Players. This was founded in 1915 by the novelist and playwright **Susan Glaspell** (1882–1948), whose plays were competent although not inspired, and her husband **George Cram Cook**. Their experimentalism was important for giving **Eugene O’Neill** (q.v.), America’s only great dramatist, the chances he needed to develop without commercial restrictions. As vital an influence on American theatre was **George Pierce Baker** (1866–1935), a Harvard professor who in 1905 set up the ‘47 Workshop’, a course in playwrighting that was taken by, among others, Winthrop Ames, O’Neill, Philip

Barry, John Dos Passos, S.N. Behrman, Sidney Howard, Thomas Wolfe (q.v.). Baker went to Yale in 1925, where he continued until his death. Wolfe's Professor Hatcher, in *Of Time and the River*, is a portrait of him.

The verse plays of William Vaughn Moody (q.v.) have already been mentioned; he was an intelligent man and an able craftsman, but he did not possess enough originality to achieve a real break-through. The best of all his works are *The Great Divide* (1909), a revision of an earlier play, about a girl who marries a man who has bought her against her will, and *The Faith Healer* (1909), about a genuine faith healer whose gift is destroyed by the scepticism of those around him. It was in this latter play that Moody came nearest to a truly modern style; but he was too inhibited to try for the rhythms of ordinary speech, and this failure seriously vitiates his achievement. **Edward Sheldon** (1886–1946) had similar difficulties with language, but had had the benefit of attending George Pierce Baker's classes. He was in fact its first distinguished graduate playwright, and his *Salvation Nell* (1908) was actually produced by the group. *The Nigger* (1909) and *The Boss* (1911) were both profoundly shocking in their day, the first because a white girl finally decided to marry the governor of a Southern state who discovers that he has Negro blood. Sheldon was blind and paralysed for the last fifteen years of his life, but continued until the end to act as consultant to actors, actresses and all connected with the theatre. His worst play, *Romance* (1913), a piece of skilfully executed middlebrow trash, was easily his most popular.

Steele MacKaye's (q.v.) son Percy MacKaye (q.v.) wrote an effective verse drama called *The Scarecrow* (1908), from Hawthorne's tale 'Feathertop'; but although this was the best thing he ever did, it solved no problems for the theatre.

Towering above these, and over all his successors, is the figure of **Eugene O'Neill** (1888–1953), the New York born son of the well known romantic actor James O'Neill, who was most celebrated in the part of the Count of Monte Cristo. O'Neill's mother was a drug addict and his brother an alcoholic. O'Neill himself suffered from ill-health for most of his life, and was, besides, a tortured soul – so much so that one of his biographers called his book *The Curse of the Misbegotten* (after O'Neill's title *A Moon for the Misbegotten*), and hardly descended into melodrama. O'Neill wrote successful plays in two styles, the realistic and the expressionist (q.v.); he also might be said to have pursued two careers in the theatre, since he was silent for the twelve years between 1934 and 1946. In 1936 he was awarded the Nobel Prize.

The theatre was in O'Neill's blood; but before he came to it he tried Princeton (a year), poetry, mining, marriage (secret and dissolved), the sea (he voyaged to South America, South Africa, several times to England), newspaper reporting, sickness, tuberculosis; and then, after writing some short plays, he joined Baker's course. In 1915 he went to Provincetown, and the Provincetown Players' performance of his one-act *Bound East for Cardiff* – on a makeshift stage in a fishermen's shack at the end of a pier, while fog seeped through the wooden walls – initiated the true birth of the American theatre. It was also the début of a playwright whom no other of his century would outdo. Baker, and the men and women of the Provincetown Players – Robert Edmond Jones, the stage designer, is important among them – had heard of what was going on in Europe: of Antoine (q.v.) in France, Reinhardt (q.v.) in Germany, Strindberg (q.v.) in Sweden, Stanislavski (q.v.) in Russia. . . . The American theatre had come of age, and its chief playwright had the required genius and nerve.

O'Neill had passion, gloom and an absolutely uncompromising realism; at the end, anguished, ill and personally unhappy though he was, he achieved a mood of something like reconciliation. The key to his achievement was stated by himself in a letter he wrote about his play *Mourning Becomes Electra*:

It needed great language . . . I haven't got that. And, by way of self-consolation, I don't think, from the evidence of all that is being written today, that great language is possible for anyone living in the discordant, broken, faithless rhythm of our time. The best one can do is to be pathetically eloquent by one's moving, dramatic inarticulations.

O'Neill was right. No nineteenth- or twentieth-century dramatist has come near to what he called 'great language' (perhaps he was thinking of Shakespeare, as we all do), but he alone authentically yearned after it. Brecht (q.v.) achieved great language – but in his lyrical poetry. Only O'Neill achieved a dramatic framework whose interstices surround poetic silences, and whose 'inarticulations' are truly 'pathetic'. He has been attacked for not producing 'heroes of stature'; but that is one of the reasons why he is truly modern.

*Beyond the Horizon* (1920), his first full-length play, is a naturalistic study of two brothers, each of whom makes the wrong choice in life, and is defeated through mistakes induced by sexual drive. *The Emperor Jones* (1921) is a piece of expressionism conceived before O'Neill knew anything of the European expressionists: a Caribbean Negro dictator flees from his victims to the sound of a relentlessly beating drum. *The Hairy Ape* (1922), another expressionistic play, deals with a brutish stoker, a sort of McTeague (q.v.) Yank, who yearns for a more human fulfilment; he ends by trying to retreat into what he thinks he is, by embracing a gorilla – which kills him.

*Desire Under the Elms* (1925), largely prompted by O'Neill's interest in Freudian psychology, is a return to realism, and is one of his most powerful plays.

*The Great God Brown* (1926) is probably too experimental for the stage, although it reads well. In it O'Neill used masks to try to define the difference between the bourgeois and the creative temperaments – but his chief character Dion Anthony (Dionysus-St. Anthony) is too symbolic, even though his anguished vacillation between pagan creativeness and Christian morality is at times most intensely and movingly conveyed. In *Marco Millions* (1928) O'Neill turned unsuccessfully to satire: this lampoon of materialism is both too obvious and tedious. There is no tension. *Dynamo* (1929) is O'Neill's worst and most theory-ridden play. Aware that he was troubled by the loss of the Catholic faith of his childhood, he tried an experiment in which he did not really believe, melodramatically showing a young man's failure to substitute faith in a dynamo for the Calvinistic faith of his childhood. *Days without End* (1934) has two actors playing the same (divided) man: a sceptic and a believer. Nothing demonstrates more clearly O'Neill's failure to rediscover Catholicism, although at the time it was widely believed that he had returned to it.

Between these two disastrous attempts, O'Neill had written the finest of all the plays of his earlier period: the trilogy, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, based on Aeschylus' Oresteian trilogy. O'Neill took a New England family in the aftermath of the Civil War and fairly carefully paralleled the Greek story: the returning General Ezra Mannon is killed by his wife Christine, whose lover Adam Brant is then killed by their son Orin, egged on by their daughter, Lavinia. Christine kills herself, Orin goes mad and commits suicide, whereupon Lavinia shuts herself up for ever with an unrelievable guilty conscience in the family mansion. This was presented in relentlessly Freudian terms, which led many critics to describe it as a case-study rather than a tragedy. O'Neill has also been attacked for his prosaic language at moments of enormous stress. But may we not, in retrospect – having had the opportunity to study the 'great language' of the wretched Christopher Fry, or even that of Tennessee Williams (qq.v.) – be grateful for this alleged 'flatness'? O'Neill knew he could not attain the great language he yearned for. And so, unlike so many lesser playwrights, he did not attempt it. One suspects that his critics would too easily

forgive a heady, contrived rhetoric of the kind so often produced by Tennessee Williams – a pseudo-poetry; dramatic occasions demand ‘high’ language. I think O’Neill was right, and that the plays are better without such language.

By 1934 O’Neill had made two more marriages, the latter of which was not unsuccessful. He went into a state of semi-permanent depression from about the mid-Thirties until the end of the war. He destroyed much that he wrote in this period, but by 1946 he felt able to release *The Iceman Cometh* (1946), which he had written in 1939. O’Neill’s experiments were necessary to him, but he always returned to the realistic mode. *The Iceman Cometh*, set in a disreputable dive for down-and-outs and outcasts, is entirely realistic; no gimmicks are required. The Iceman of the title is death, which is the only release from the illusions that torment mankind. The salesman Hickey tells all the drinkers in Harry Hope’s bar that their only chance of happiness is to renounce hope. Previously happy in their absurd and drunken way, they now disbelieve Hickey and go out to prove him wrong. But each returns: broken. Then Hickey turns out to have killed his wife. When he gives himself up to the police, all but one of them return to their old contentment. Like Dreiser (q.v.), though in an utterly different and more poetic manner, O’Neill here richly conveys the actual grain of life. It does not much matter if you agree with his philosophy or not. Its torpor is counteracted by the lyricism of the outcasts’ hope – and of their despair.

O’Neill wrote a number of other plays, none of which was performed in his lifetime. *A Moon for the Misbegotten* (1952) was withdrawn while on trial. *More Stately Mansions* (1964), a study of the breakdown of a poetic soul into madness, has only been tried out in a cut, Swedish version. *A Touch of the Poet* (1957), the sole survivor from a projected eleven-play cycle called *A Tale of Possessors Self-Dispossessed*, contains an unforgettable portrait of a man who seems to attain stature through self-deceit and selfishness. In the one-act *Hughie* (1959) and *Long Day’s Journey into Night* (1956) O’Neill rose to the heights of his achievement. In *Hughie* he perfectly captures a vernacular more difficult than that of his early sea dramas: the speech of seedy, boastful New York drifters of the Twenties. *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, a semi-autobiographical family-drama, is his simplest play. Here O’Neill demonstrates his genius beyond doubt: there is no plot and no drama, the play is very long – and yet it holds the attention. Alan S. Downer has written wisely of it: ‘It cannot be overemphasized that this is a play of reconciliation; the audience that has experienced *Long Day’s Journey* cannot go out of the theatre without a greater capacity for tolerance and understanding. . . .’

Not one of O’Neill’s American and British contemporaries and successors can be compared to him: his plays are torn from him; theirs are, at best, made. American theatre, like the British, lacked vitality in the Thirties, and this lack was made even more manifest by the example of O’Neill, who could be criticized for all sorts of faults, but never for lack of vitality or attack. Only Pirandello, Brecht, Lorca and perhaps Synge (qq.v.) are the equal of O’Neill in our century.

The verse drama does not seem to be a viable form in our century (the German habit of writing in verse is hardly relevant here), despite valiant attempts; it has been as successful in America as almost anywhere.

Archibald MacLeish (1892–1982) wrote *Nobo-daddy* (1926), the labour play *Panic* (1935), and *J.B.* (1958), his most successful play, in which a contemporary Job acts out his story in a circus tent. He also wrote several effective verse plays for radio, including *Air Raid* (1938). MacLeish began as a poet, and his *The Hamlet of A. MacLeish* (1928), one of those long poems inspired by the success of *The Waste Land* (q.v.), was taken with seriousness. He shifted from the extreme subjectivity of this poem to a somewhat simple-minded

advocacy of full political 'engagement'. He was Librarian of Congress 1939–44, and was influential in the Roosevelt administration. He ranks, David Ray has written (damning with faint praise?), 'with Robinson Jeffers and Carl Sandburg in the penetration of public taste'. But not, one has to add, with Brecht (q.v.). MacLeish has written sincere and unpretentious verse, and has been an admirable public man – one of the most admirable of the time, a genuinely well-intentioned link between poets and an establishment that cannot take them into account. The poetry of his plays, however, contributes nothing whatever to them. *J.B.* was apparently personally inspiring to a number of those who watched it; this is admirable. But the nature of the inspiration is nearer to that of a good sermon or exhortation than to, say, Sherwood Anderson's (q.v.) various autobiographical writings. These are true literature because they never exhort: the author lives entirely in his imagination. MacLeish appears to have no such imaginative, internal centre.

The same applies to **Maxwell Anderson** (1888–1959), who wrote plays in verse (and, in 1925, one book of poetry) and yet who was not a poet. He tried for the 'great language' that O'Neill (q.v.) knew could not be achieved: he felt that there could be no 'great drama' without 'great poetry', and he did not claim that his own verse was well written. He may have been right about 'great drama'; the trouble was that he thought anyone could write poetry – if 'badly' – not realizing that it takes a poet. The career of Anderson, a worthy, gifted and sincere writer, and a fine craftsman of the theatre, affords an illustration of the harsh fact that art and commerce do not and cannot really mix. Art may or may not be successful in terms of the market; once a writer orients himself towards the market, however, he destroys his imaginative credibility. Anderson was a serious man who nevertheless conceived it as his duty to entertain middlebrow audiences. His and **Laurence Stallings'** (1894–1968) *What Price Glory* (1924), on the American soldiery of the First World War, was a hit. It was outspoken for its time, but its realism is in fact tawdry and its comedy as second-hand as it is second-rate. Anderson improved on this, but always conceived of a play not only as a dramatically viable entity but also as suitable fare for commercial audiences, whom he believed he could convert to his own humane point of view. And so he did; but this, like a response to Billy Graham, was temporary, because Anderson did not write from his imagination. Verse operates in his drama as an effective rhetoric. True, it is a rather less meretricious rhetoric than that of Christopher Fry (q.v.), but it is never remotely poetic. *Elizabeth the Queen* (1930), on Elizabeth and Essex, was the first modern blank-verse play to pay at the box-office. *Both Your Houses* (1933) attacked political corruption. Probably Anderson's most famous play was *Winterset* (1935), his second attempt to deal with the truly tragic material of the Sacco-Vanzetti case. It was a success at the time, but a total failure in literary terms: as Edmund Wilson wrote, 'in the text I could not discover anything that seemed to me in the least authentic as emotion, idea or characterization'. He rated Anderson more highly as a prose playwright. Anderson's best is in fact the relaxed musical comedy *Knickerbocker Holiday* (1938), which had the inestimable advantage of a score by Kurt Weill. Anderson came off in his lifetime, and deserved to; it seems unlikely that any of his plays will survive.

**Sidney Howard** (1891–1939), a Californian who died prematurely in an accident with a tractor on his farm, was as skilful as Anderson (q.v.), but more orthodox. He was a member of Baker's '47 Workshop'. His first play, in verse, flopped; he took the hint and did not return to this medium. Howard went on to do fine, conscientious work of all kinds – translations (Vildrac's *S.S. Tenacity*, q.v.), adaptations (*The Late Christopher Bean*, 1932), documentaries (*Yellow Jack*, with Paul de Kruif, 1934) as well as original plays. *They Knew What They Wanted* (1924), which was granted a second lease of life in 1957 as the musical *The Most Happy Fella*, was a lively comedy about a Californian grapegrower and his mail-order bride, and immediately established Howard. In the same year

Howard collaborated with Edward Sheldon (q.v.) on *Bewitched. The Silver Cord* (1926) was an unsentimental and psychologically accurate portrayal of a possessive mother, and would stand revival. *Paths of Glory* (1935), adapted from a novel by Humphrey Cobb, was an excellent anti-war play, and was made into a moving film with real and effective bitterness against war. Howard listened carefully to common speech and reported it accurately. He is an example of the man who does the best he can – rather than compromise himself – with a limited imagination: a really good second-class playwright.

**Robert Sherwood** (1896–1955), a forthright radical who was gassed in the First World War, and put much of his energy into anti-totalitarian activities, was perhaps as skilful – but more trivial. *The Petrified Forest* (1935), although its theme is ostensibly the disintegration of the artist in modern society, suffers from technical slickness and sentimentality, though the movie gave Humphrey Bogart his first important part. The ‘continental’ comedy *Reunion in Vienna* (1931) is not as intellectually ambitious, and is Sherwood’s best play. A psychiatrist thinks that a love-affair his wife is conducting with Prince Maximilian Rudolph, whose mistress she has been, will cure her of an obsession; his complacency is shattered. Apart from this and *Tovarich* (1936), which he adapted, Sherwood is probably better regarded as an admirable journalist than as an imaginative writer. He wrote some of Roosevelt’s speeches.

**Elmer Rice** (ps. **Elmer Reizenstein**, 1892–1967), a worthy man of the theatre, may be described as an experimentalist of abundant gifts but no genius. Rice, like Sherwood (q.v.), is a radical, and has on several occasions taken a stand against censorship and witch-hunting by the authorities. His first play, *On Trial* (1914), a thriller, used the movie technique of flashback. *The Adding Machine* (1923) depicts Mr. Zero, executed for the murder of his boss, dissatisfied in the Elysian Fields and returning to the earth to become a perfect slave of the machine age. This is wholly expressionistic in technique, and a fine satire, which Rice has not bettered. Unfortunately Rice has no capacity for psychological penetration or characterization – even of the workmanlike sort practised by Howard (q.v.) – and this has tended to impoverish his drama. His best plays after *The Adding Machine* are the realistic *Street Scene* (1929), *Dream Girl* (1945) and *Cue for Passion* (1958).

**Philip Barry** (1896–1949), another of Baker’s pupils, collaborated with Rice (q.v.) in *Cock Robin* (1928). Barry was another prolific, intelligent and workmanlike playwright. Many of his plays are comedies with a serious note; the others tend to be his best. *You and I* (1923) is a poignant study of a father who discovers his own frustrations when he tries to turn his son into an artist. *Hotel Universe* (1930) was perhaps unfortunate: this drama of an old man who helps people to find themselves was rather too well made and contrived, but some of the individual portraits – including a man who has lost his faith and a girl whose love is unrequited – are excellent. He realized his potential most fully in *Here Come the Clowns* (1938), an odd and disturbing play about the effects of a magician’s hypnotic powers on a vaudeville troupe. Barry was also responsible for the smooth and entertaining *The Philadelphia Story* (1939).

**S.N. Behrman** (1893), yet another of Baker’s pupils, tried to combine comedy with social drama, and dealt, in *No Time for Comedy* (1939), with his own predicament. Once again, too much skill at entertainment vitiated seriousness. He adapted, with Joshua Logan, Pagnol’s *Fanny* (q.v.) as a musical comedy in 1945.

**George S. Kaufman** (1889–1961) and **Marc Connelly** (1890) began in collaboration, with several plays, the most successful of which was *Beggar on Horseback* (1924), an expressionist satire on the oppression of the artist (here, a composer) by bourgeois society. Kaufman went on to write several smooth farces, some with **Moss Hart** (1904–61), including the famous and deftly written portrait of Alexander Woollcott, *The Man Who Came to Dinner* (1939). Connelly’s Negro play, *The Green Pastures*, has a little more weight; but this

well-meant picture – based on a well-known book of sketches – of the Negro conception of the Old Testament is at heart both folksy and patronizing rather than dignified and poetic.

The Thirties saw the rise of a more aggressive social theatre, whose white hope was **Clifford Odets** (1906–63). Odets was a protégé of the important Group Theatre, founded by Harold Clurman, Lee Strasberg and Cheryl Crawford in 1931. The actor and director Elia Kazan was early associated with this venture, which devoted itself to Stanislavsky's (q.v.) principles of group acting. (Kazan later, 1947, founded the influential Actors' Studio, which taught the Method, a technique in which the actor is exhorted to 'become' the part he is playing. The Method is less different from other methods of training actors than some have thought, since every actor should in one way or another 'become' the stage-person he is representing – provided he does not forget the audience.) Odets began with *Waiting for Lefty* (1935), an effective and bitter piece, without characterization, about a taxicab strike. *Awake and Sing* (1935), ecstatic, well made, at times funny, established him as the leading playwright of his generation. *Golden Boy* (1937) is so well done that its central character, a musician who turns under economic pressure to professional boxing, is made almost credible. By the time of *The Big Knife* (1948) Odets, while he retained all his skill, had become affected by the pressures involved in producing big, successful plays: this indictment of Hollywood seems to come right out of Hollywood itself.

**Sidney Kingsley** (1906) was another competent social dramatist, responsible for the originals of the movies *Dead End* and *Detective Story*. His first play, *Men in White* (1933) about a young doctor's indecisions, is among his best. *They Shall Not Die* (1934) by **John Wesley** (1902) and *Stevedore* (1934) by **Paul Peters** (1908) were more strident: written with the leftist fervour of Odets (q.v.), they lacked his passionateness and concern for character.

**John Howard Lawson** (1895) preceded all these left-wing or Marxist playwrights. Lawson began with expressionist plays, such as *Roger Bloomer* (1923) and *Processional* (1925), all of which harped on class distinction. In 1936 he wrote a Marxist textbook of proletarian theatre. Once again, although he is a very skilful writer, he is best considered as a journalist and a propagandist for social change. Really only Odets (q.v.), of the social and Marxist dramatists, achieved anything beyond the journalistic – and he did not altogether fulfil his promise.

**Lillian Hellman** (1905), who was born in New Orleans, is as radical as any of these, but is less ideological and more interested in characterization. Her one attempt at a proletarian piece, *Days to Come* (1936), about a strike, failed. She is one of the most able and effective of modern dramatists in the old 'well-made' technique. Her first play, *The Children's Hour* (1934), about a schoolgirl who maliciously accuses her two headmistresses of being lesbian, is skilful but ambiguous in that it leaves the audience in doubt as to whether the greater vileness in the play is the child's false accusation or lesbianism itself. *The Little Foxes* (1939) is an excellent study of greed and unpleasantness: a Southern family seizes its opportunities as industrialism rises there. Her next two plays, *Watch on the Rhine* (1941) and *The Searching Wind* (1944), were finely made propaganda against fascism and opportunistic appeasement respectively. Then came her best play: *Another Part of the Forest* (1946), a comic study, rightly described as Jonsonian, of hateful people cheating each other. *Toys in the Attic* (1960) embodies Lillian Hellman's most memorable portrait of an evil person, and her most hopeful (if defeated) one. Charges of misanthropy against Miss Hellman are frivolous, and come from those whose optimism is flabby. But the 'well-madeness' of her plays does tend to vitiate them, even though one recognizes that she cannot proceed except in this way. *Another Part of the Forest* is a picaresque comedy, and is freer from the limitations of 'sardoodledom' (q.v.) than any other of her

plays. (*The Little Foxes*, written earlier, is its sequel in time.)

**William Saroyan** (1908), born of Armenian parents in California, had exuberance, energy and tenderness; he might have been a major writer, and as it is he is now an undervalued one; unfortunately he was seldom able to control his sentimentality, or force himself into moods in the least discriminatory. For this naïve (q.v.), all that matters is the glory of the dream. 'He puts everything in', one critic has said, 'in case he misses anything important'. He never went beyond his fictional début, *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze* (1934), short stories written with a strikingly innocent eye and a direct, appealing lyricism. Saroyan went on to produce much more fiction of the same sort, but the good bits become harder to find. He made his début as a playwright with *My Heart's in the Highlands* (1939) and *The Time of Your Life* (1939), the curious opposite of O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* (q.v.) since the somewhat similar central character dispenses happiness, not despair. For a time it looked to many people as though Saroyan might become an important figure in the theatre, but he lacked craftsmanship and discipline, and all his promise petered out into showy, patchy, sentimental drama such as *The Beautiful People* (1941) or improvisations such as his more recent *Sam the Highest Jumper of them All* (1960). One play stands out among all the others: *Hello Out There* (1942), a genuinely tragic one-act piece about the lynching of a tramp. Saroyan can be silly ('I am so innately great by comparison others who believe they are great ... seem to me to be only pathetic, although occasionally charming'), and he has produced masses of rubbish; but his best is worth looking for.

**Thornton Wilder** (1897–1975), born at Madison, Wisconsin, novelist and playwright, has certainly been an odd man out throughout his career; his work, unquestionably skilful, intelligent and technically resourceful, has been the subject of much controversy: is he at heart a middlebrow charlatan exploiting the discoveries and procedures of his betters, or is he an original writer with something of his own to say? The truth is that Wilder seems pretentious because (as he himself has come near to admitting) he can never answer the huge questions he asks. He is by no means a middlebrow in intention, and he has specifically stated that one of the problems of the modern dramatist is to create a theatre that will be genuinely disturbing to its audience. But in actually dealing with this problem he has succeeded in pleasing rather than worrying them: they can think they are worried, but are not really. He lacks an inner core of imaginative resilience, or passion, and consequently too quickly falls back on mere cleverness, laced with folksiness and sentimentality. In other words, his unconventionality resides in his daring technique rather than in his somewhat unoriginal content. The impact of his plays (and novels, with one exception) is perfectly middlebrow in that it provokes superficial 'discussion' rather than meditation or wonder. *Our Town* (1938) gives the intimate history of a New Hampshire town by means of a bare stage (a shrewd reaction against the theatre's obsession at this time with décor) and a choric stage manager, who describes the characters and talks casually to the audience. It is a dazzling performance, but all it ultimately offers is the rather mundane thought that there is 'something way down deep that's eternal about a human being': a Yankee inarticulateness underlies the high articulateness of the bright presentation. In *The Skin of Our Teeth* (1942) the Antrobus family represent humanity and the escape, by the proverbial skin, from most of the terrors that are known to have beset the race. This is again brilliant; but an arch folksiness precludes real warmth.

Wilder's first popular success was the novel *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (1927), which traces the fortunes of a number of people killed when a South American bridge collapses. But this was meretricious compared with his first novel, *The Cabala* (1926), or with the most solid of all his works, *Heaven's My Destination* (1935), about a book salesman called

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George Brush, a foolish saint, who reminds one of Duhamel's Salavin (q.v.). In this comic story Wilder found his own voice, and although his plays have their moving moments, they never measure up to this (he did not come back to fiction until 1967, with *The Eighth Day*; this has all the old brilliance of technique, but is otherwise sadly disappointing), which is a major work.



Since the Second World War the theatre almost everywhere has got increasingly into the hands of the directors; in certain cases the public are even more interested in the producers of plays than their authors. Americans have reacted to this by going 'off Broadway', and now this is where most of the dramatic energy lies. Great Britain is beginning to follow suit. The development is a healthy one, because it means that playwrights, writing for tiny audiences, are able to get away from commercial demands to fulfil artistic ones. This kind of theatre sees as much rubbish as the commercial theatre; but the good writers have more chance. However, the playwrights who dominated the immediate post-war scene – Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller and, to a lesser extent, William Inge (qq.v.) – had to fight for recognition in the commercial theatre. This is an artistically dangerous business – not everyone is Shakespeare, who was, of course, a commercial success.

**Tennessee Williams** (ps. **Thomas Lanier Williams**, 1911–83) was born in Mississippi. His father was a salesman who was probably (according to a gossipy book Williams' mother wrote) a mean drunk; at all events in his childhood he knew more anger and alienation than love. After much struggle to establish himself, Williams found an agent who believed in him, and in 1945, with *The Glass Menagerie*, he became accepted. His persistent theme is the agonized, even shrieking alienation of violent and crippled eccentrics: homosexuals, madmen, sex-driven women. The air his characters naturally breathe is that of romantic hysteria; without it they would wilt and die immediately. He combines lush vulgarity with lyrical despair, to produce plays of undeniable power. But their language is not enduring, and they fade in the mind. He is adept at presenting nerve-shot situations, but has never written a successful play of reconciliation. His characters are happiest at not being happy, and when his plots contrive to satisfy them they protest by being totally unconvincing: a tribute to the power of his depiction of despair. Williams shows sensitive people as being ravished by the brutal and materialistic demands of society. But this is not genuine social comment: his sensitives are too often hopeless and irremediably crippled neurotics, and 'society' is represented by persons whose greed or lust or dishonesty is pathological. He loves the grotesque, and in effect he pays tribute to it by lyrically depicting hells on earth. But he could move convincingly.

His first success, *The Glass Menagerie* – his twelfth play – is his tenderest and best: this account of a slightly crippled girl's coming briefly out of the world of dreams she lives in – symbolized by a menagerie of glass animals – is moving within a non-pathological realm. The rest of Williams' plays are set in a pathological world that does not often allow the spectator to visualize his own world – equally tragic – that is not entirely peopled by freaks. *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) almost succeeds, but Blanche, its heroine, destroyed and driven into madness by the hideous Stanley, is herself too impossible to gain full sympathy. *The Rose Tattoo* (1951), about Gulf-coast Sicilians, declines into sentimentality and a false vitality. *Camino Real* (1953), a fantasy, is another failure: it has theatre-life, as a clever rhetoric, but a cool reading exposes its pretensions – and reveals the meagreness of

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linguistic resource which is Williams' basic weakness. The more realistic *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), dealing with the frustrations and anguishes of a Southern family, contains some marvellously evocative individual portraits – Big Daddy, his alcoholic son Brick who cannot face up to the homosexual component in himself, his wife Maggie – but does not altogether succeed in setting them against each other. This is a play in which Williams, not dishonestly, tries to suggest the possibility of future happiness (for Maggie and the too detached Brick); but it remains unconvincing. In the Gothic *Suddenly Last Summer* (1958) the homosexual 'poet' Edward, the unseen hero, is eaten by the boys he has used (a characteristically vague allusion to Orpheus being devoured by furies). His mother, in order to inherit his fortune, is glad to submit her daughter-in-law to a lobotomy. The language here is particularly thin, and the intentions confused; but there are moments of power. More recently Williams wrote *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1959), the factitious *The Night of the Iguana* (1961) and *The Eccentricities of a Nightingale* (1965). Williams, gifted as a realist, has chosen – and on balance the choice is probably a correct one – to work in more or less expressionist modes. This leads him into some difficulties with language; but he does gain poetic, and sometimes heartrending, effects from his juxtapositions of characters and settings. He is a writer as flawed as any of his heroes; but more of a genius, too, than any of them. In 1969 he joined the Roman Catholic Church, perhaps as a substitute for the writing of plays, which had served (he has said) as 'therapy' to reduce tension. He is the author of a not outstanding novel, *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone* (1950), another later one no better, many short stories (*One Arm*, 1948; *Hard Candy*, 1954; *It Happened the Day the Sun Rose*, 1982) and some fuzzy, mystical verse that is collected in *In the Winter of Cities* (1956 rev. 1964). He has not really, as a writer, faced up to the problem that obsesses him: homosexual anguish.

**Arthur Miller** (1915), who was born in New York City, has by contrast more of the journalist and social reformer than of the poet in him, but is as important as Williams (q.v.). Miller began to write plays while at the University of Michigan, won prizes, and after graduation (1938) worked for the Federal Theatre Project. (This, which lasted from the autumn of 1935 to the summer of 1939, was the first American state-sponsored theatre project, a typically New Deal enterprise which invented such devices as the Living Newspaper, and encouraged Negro theatre; it was suppressed by reactionary elements in Congress.) *Situation Normal* (1944) was a rather flat and starry-eyed piece of reportage about military life; *Focus* (1955) is an ironic novel about anti-semitism: the protagonist is an anti-semitic Gentile who gets demoted when a new pair of spectacles makes him appear Jewish; but he is slow to learn the lesson, and when he finally does his transformed character is unconvincing.

In 1947, with the strong drama of *All My Sons* (1947), Miller established himself as, with Tennessee Williams, America's leading young dramatist. This is a straightforward, traditional play, which shows the strong influence of Ibsen (q.v.), whose *Enemy of the People* Miller adapted in 1951. Joe Keller has in the war allowed some faulty engine parts to be sent to the air force, which has meant the deaths of some pilots; his partner has been wrongly blamed and imprisoned, while he was exonerated. Now, after the war, his son discovers his guilt – and that his own elder brother, having realized their father's guilt, has allowed himself to be killed as a kind of expiation. Joe, after trying to wriggle out of his responsibility in every way, kills himself when he realizes that those dead pilots were all his sons. ... This is a good, well constructed play, but nothing out of the ordinary. Far superior is *Death of a Salesman* (1949), which was directed by Elia Kazan (q.v.) and had the excellent Lee J. Cobb in the leading role. Willy Loman, who is presented with great compassion, is perhaps still the most vivid example on the modern stage of the 'other directed' man of modern industrial societies that David Riesman pos-

tulated in his (and collaborators') *The Lonely Crowd*: the social character who is controlled by the expectations of other people, the 'marketing character' of Erich Fromm (who has influenced Riesman), who becomes anxious when he 'lapses' from the standards of selling himself to other people. Like all his kind, Willy preaches the bourgeois virtues to his family; but in reality he accepts dishonesty. But Miller shows him as possessing a humanity that, deep down, recognizes this. His suicide is genuinely tragic.

*The Crucible* (1953), about the notorious Salem witch trials, was performed at a time when witch-hunting for communists was prevalent in the United States. This is a play about commitment, and the French movie script was written by Sartre (q.v.): condemned to die for witchcraft, John Proctor confesses to it to save his life – but then refuses to live, and thus triumphs.

In 1956 Miller married the film-actress Marilyn Monroe, and became the object of a good deal of publicity which did not help his creative life. He wrote a film for her, *The Misfits* (1961), which is presented in its published form as a kind of novel; this is interesting, but its attempt to show how innocence (Miller had seen Marilyn Monroe as innocent) is destroyed was vitiated by the nature of the medium itself. The ending is sentimental – and Miller does not really suffer from sentimentality. He and Marilyn Monroe were divorced in 1960.

*After the Fall* (1964) is overtly autobiographical, though Miller later denied this: Maggie is clearly a representation of Marilyn Monroe (who had recently died) and Quentin is the 'intellectual' Miller. It is as good as any of Miller's previous plays, and is most notable for its maturity – a maturity beyond that of any commercial audience – and its refusal to find easy or glib solutions. In *Incident at Vichy* (1964), a semi-documentary, about the Nazis' treatment of various Frenchmen, he seemed to be marking time, but the play is workmanlike and more than mere entertainment. He has not written anything very substantial since.

It is in Miller that 'social realism', in the most intelligent, Ibsenian sense, has found its best and most compassionate playwright.

**William Inge** (1913–73), who was born in Kansas, is more conventional in technique than either Williams or Miller (qq.v.); his plays are not as ambitious, but he has successfully portrayed midwest people, intelligently revealing them as they are beneath the public surface. *Come Back, Little Sheba* (1950) is one of the best of modern plays on the subject of alcoholism. *Picnic* (1953) and *Bus Stop* (1955) became famous in movie versions; in the latter the old technical device of bringing strangers fortuitously together is given new life by fine characterization and convincing dialogue. *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* (1958) is that darkness into which both the child of a family and its parents dare not – whatever they pretend – climb up to. *A Loss of Roses* (1960) was a disappointment: the relationship between a mother and her son clearly springs from a psychiatric textbook rather than from a human situation. Inge is perhaps not more than a useful playwright (in the sense that Telemann and Hindemith are useful composers) – but this is something considerable in its own right.

The off-Broadway movement has not yet brought many playwrights to prominence; but that sort of prominence may not be what the real theatre needs. However, three dramatists who have graduated from this milieu to some commercial success should be mentioned. The best known, **Edward Albee** (1928), is not necessarily superior, although his *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1963) is more substantial than anything so far written by **Jack Gelber** (1932) or **Jack Richardson** (1934). Albee is unusual in that he seems to have nothing in him of American optimism, and actually began – with *The Zoo Story* (1959) – with an example of the Theatre of the Absurd (q.v.). Even so, this brilliant dialogue does end both violently and sentimentally: a gesture, it seems, to the American

insistence on one or the other (in the absence of actual Utopian choruses). Its theme – a young homosexual inveigles an ordinary bourgeois into killing him – foreshadowed that of its successors, except for *The Death of Bessie Smith* (1959) and *The American Dream* (1960). The adventure into realism of the former has a shocking subject: the real reasons for the refusal of a hospital for whites to admit the injured blues singer, whom they could have saved. But it is no more than a dreary and uninteresting protest piece. *The American Dream* abandons realism, and is better. This is a send-up of America in terms of its clichés, beautifully heard and reproduced, that resembles Karl Kraus (q.v.) even more than Ionesco (q.v.), upon whose techniques it greatly depends.

*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1963) is superbly inventive theatre, but is ultimately sterile, inasmuch as it amounts to an alyrical assault not merely on marriage but on all heterosexuality. Or that is how I read it. But its dialogue is masterly in its capture – or deadly parody – of a certain kind of upper middle-class Americanese; and throughout there is a yearning for understanding. *Tiny Alice* (1965) is a kind of disguised well-made play. A story of the richest woman in the world who seduces, marries and destroys a Catholic lay-brother, it works well on the stage, but reads badly except to critics set on interpreting its incredibly complicated symbolism. Once again, the real theme is the horror any man lays in store for himself by having truck with the evil trickster Woman. But for some the mood and language raise the play above this. In *A Delicate Balance* (1966) Albee returns to more realistic family horrors, but the message is similar. Albee does not of course load the dice against women, or make his men paragons – he is too intelligent; it is simply that one gets a strong sense, from his plays, that for him femininity is the ultimate destroyer and spoiler of happiness. But the greatly inferior William Burroughs (q.v.) is completely (and stupidly) explicit on this point, whereas it would certainly be doing Albee an injustice to suggest that this is his rational view. Albee has made excellent adaptations of Carson McCullers' *The Ballad of the Sad Café* (q.v., 1963) and *Malcolm* (1965), James Purdy's (q.v.) novel. Albee alternates adaptations with original plays, and, while the adaptations remain excellent, the language of the original plays has become coarser and more rhetorical; but in the theatre Albee remains compelling.

Jack Gelber's *The Connection* (1960) vacillates too uncertainly between realism and expressionism – Gelber is not sure whether he wants to protest against the drug laws or to depict a group of junkies waiting for their fix – but is nevertheless a vivid and accurate presentation of people who simply don't want anything to do with society. Its form is interesting: a jazz quartet improvises on the stage, two film cameramen become involved in the action; the aimless dialogue is authentic. *The Apple* (1961), an improvisation, departs more radically from the conventional theatre, but is less successful. *On Ice* (1965), a novel about a hipster called Manny, is surprisingly low in energy and humour. Gelber has continued to write plays – *Starters* (1980) – and he also works in the theatre; but he has never equalled his first play.

Jack Richardson's *The Prodigal* (1960), an acerb and witty treatment of the Orestes theme, came from off Broadway; so did his *Gallows Humour* (1961). *The Prison Life of Harris Philmore* (1961) is a novel. Richardson has for some reason written no plays since 1968: he does not much like the theatre.

Another American dramatist who has attracted attention by serious work is Paddy Chayefsky (1923). He began as a television playwright, and became famous when *Marty* (1953) was filmed, with Ernest Borgnine. *The Bachelor Party* (1954), a touching but not quite unsentimental play, was also filmed. Chayefsky was attacked for his 'tape recorder' realism, and has unwisely tried in his stage plays for symbolic effects which do not really suit him. For *The Tenth Man*, his best play, he combined an authentic Bronx setting with the Jewish legend of the Dybbuk.

However, despite the vitality and proper irreverence of the off-Broadway drama, the American theatre is in decline. Critics have tried to compare Albee to O'Neill (qq.v.), but this is foolish, especially when it is suggested that the former is 'more articulate' (Leonard Ashley). It is significant that Richardson has remained silent so far as the theatre is concerned. But mention should be made of one fine playwright who died young. **Lorraine Hansberry** (1930–65) called herself a 'playwright who happened to be black', and this was a sensible self-characterization. She began as a painter, but found that she was not good enough to satisfy her high standards. In *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959), rightly called the best American play of the Fifties, she depicted an episode in the life of a black family in Chicago (she came from that city): the family suddenly obtain some money and decide to buy a house in a white neighbourhood (as the author's father had done). This was deservedly very successful, and was filmed from Lorraine Hansberry's script in 1961. *The Sign in Sydney Brustein's Window* (1964) was about a New York Jewish intellectual. It was tragic that this warm, intelligent and vigorous talent, capable of giving so much more, was cut short by cancer.

## IV

**Gertrude Stein** (1874–1946), born of a wealthy family near Pittsburgh, was not altogether modern – she has even been put forward as one who belonged essentially to the 'sunset phase' of the nineteenth century – but she understood the importance of modernity. Her writings were not, as Sherwood Anderson (q.v.) saw, necessarily very important in themselves; but they provided incomparable signposts for others more imaginatively gifted. Gertrude Stein studied at Radcliffe under, among others, Santayana and Moody (qq.v.); the most important influence on her there, however, was William James. She planned to become a psychologist, and so began medicine, including brain anatomy, at Johns Hopkins. In 1903 she went abroad, learnt about art from her brother Leo, who – though he kept in the background – was always a better art critic than she, and set about establishing herself as an expatriate queen and patron of artists. She bought the work of Picasso, Braque, Matisse and others, and amassed a famous collection. She lived with her secretary and companion Alice B. Toklas in Paris for the rest of her life (except for a period during the war, when they lived in Vichy), returning to America only once – for a lecture tour in 1934. Her early books appeared so difficult that she had to publish or guarantee them herself. But when she had acquired fame as a personality, through both her salon and her assumption of the headship of the avant garde of the Twenties, she was able to write a popular book: *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933), which purported to be her life as told by her friend. She repeated this with *Everybody's Autobiography* (1937). Gertrude Stein encouraged Anderson, Hemingway, Wilder, Fitzgerald (qq.v.) and others gifted, talented – and mediocre. No poet gained anything from her example. But she was certainly regarded as the most influential English-speaking writer in Paris in the early Twenties – Pound ('Gertrude Stein liked him', said Miss Stein in *Toklas*, 'but did not find him amusing. She said he was a village explainer, excellent if you were a village, but if you were not, not') and Ford Madox Ford (qq.v.) were also there. In her last years she and Miss Toklas entertained many American soldiers; she had known the Americans of two wars, and wrote of them in the popular *Wars I Have Seen* (1944) and in *Brewste and Willie* (1946). This latter was her last; it reconstructed the language of the GI Joes of 1944–5 with brilliance and affection as well as sentimentality.

Apart from her popular works, which are not only witty and readable but also sometimes egocentric and surprisingly arch, *Three Lives* (1909), and some posthumously printed earlier writings, Gertrude Stein's books are hard to read: child-like but repetitious, monotonous and not always justifiably inscrutable. It was after *Three Lives* (her best work) that she began to evolve the style for which she is known. By that time she had come to understand what Pablo Picasso and his friends were trying to do in painting: to elevate the picture itself over its 'subject'. Thus, for her, words became objects-in-themselves. Meaning became an overtone. Picasso and the others concentrated on the paintings; she concentrated on the writing. (This offered, perhaps, a convenient enough way of evading the issue of self-appraisal.) Her teacher William James had 'discovered' the 'stream of consciousness' (q.v.); as a psychologist he was interested in the flux itself – whereas she was more interested in the moment of 'the complete actual present': in the capturing of instants. One of the intentions of her repetitions is to convey an illusion like that of a motion picture: each sentence is a 'frame', and differs only slightly from its predecessor. Once the novelty has worn off, this tends, of course, to be as boring as exposing each frame of a movie not for a fraction of a second but for several minutes. But perhaps it had to be done. Gertrude Stein had the effrontery and self-confidence to do it.

She was also against the 'objective' or transcendent self: the self of which James claimed psychology could give no account. In that hopeful, Utopian manner common to many Americans she believed in the present – and thought the future was a rosy one. Perhaps such optimism requires to ignore sequence, structure and what I have called, in relation to Dreiser, the grain of life. The substantial, or transcendent, or objective self – what Wyndham Lewis (q.v.) thought of as 'the eye of the artist' – did not interest her any more than 'realism': she was peculiarly modern in this concentration on the qualities of objects, and in her opposition to 'stories'. She tried to get rid of narrative and put into its place a technique of extracting the essential quality of a thing or person. For example, this piece called 'A Cloth' from *Tender Buttons* (1914): 'Enough cloth is plenty and more, more is almost enough for that and besides if there is no more spreading is there plenty of room for it. Any occasion shows the best way'. Witty, intelligent – but trivial, and when in bulk, tiresome. ... This was the trap into which she fell. Not perhaps wishing her imagination to be free to investigate her lesbian – and masochistic – personality, she allowed herself to create abstractions that were inexorably separated from life or anything like it. *Ida, a Novel* (1941), for example, is really 'about' all that is least important in its protagonist's life – or at any rate it tells us nothing that is significant. The mimetic or representational was for Gertrude Stein a vulgarity and a sentimentality. Her writing tried to be 'abstract' in the sense that painting is abstract. It is curious that of her modern non-representational or would-be non-representational successors (Olsen, Creeley, qq.v. etc., etc.) only the American poet Robert Duncan has shown any real interest in her; but he is an 'intellectual', and very well read, as she was; the others cannot really be described as such. She also influenced Laura Riding (q.v.), but there were complications in this because Riding refuses to admit to having been influenced by anyone – impossible though that is.

Gertrude Stein was in her own way, from her 'home town' of Paris, an American pioneer. She saw how American procedures – indecorous and adventurous – differed from English, which are neat and traditional because 'Nothing is perplexing if there is an island. The special sign of this is in dusting'. In other words, she saw the right direction for American literature. But she became increasingly megalomaniac and remote, and it is not strange that she early turned from novelist to critic (demonstrator of how things ought to be done). *Things As They Are* (1950), a straightforward (though not 'obscene') treatment of a lesbian theme, written in 1903, gives us some clue as to why she chose the course she

did. It is fortunate that she wrote *Three Lives* (1909) before she made this choice, for it is a masterpiece – as well as being the most accessible of all her writings. There are hints of the future manner, but it has not degenerated into a method and become tiresome. The book consists of three stories of women, all of whom are defeated by life. Outstanding is ‘Melanctha’, about the daughter of a Mulatto mother and a Negro father who hates her: this, as has many times been pointed out, is almost the first American fiction to treat a Negro as a human being. The vigour and scope of this book make it clear that Gertrude Stein abandoned imaginative for critical fiction for reasons other than experiential capacity. *Three Lives* owes much to Flaubert. One wonders what effective literature does not. . . .

**Elizabeth Madox Roberts** (1886–1941), born in Kentucky, is unlucky not to be as well remembered as Stein (q.v.): she was more imaginatively gifted – though not as obviously historically important. Her first novel, about Kentucky hill-dwellers, *The Time of Man* (1926), immediately established her reputation, and led Wescott (q.v.) to remark, justly, that ‘no other author will ever have the right to call his place Kentucky’. Although somewhat laboured in its attempt to parallel Homer, this first novel demonstrated the huge grasp of Roberts’ imagination, as well as her acute intelligence. It is most successful in its depiction of the individual struggles of its migrant-farmer’s-wife protagonist’s struggles against malign fate and the cyclical nature of the life of poor white Kentuckians – in part she accepts this with serenity, but she also revolts against it within herself, and in a way peculiar to herself. The material of this book is reworked and refined in her best novel, *The Great Meadow* (1930), which is set in the eighteenth century – and is surprisingly, but successfully, sensational in some of its incidents (which include scalplings). It is the most achieved of all the versions of the settling of Kentucky. Elizabeth Madox Roberts was also a poet (her poems are still seen in children’s anthologies); this side of her came out in two mystical novels which ultimately fail, but of which the first is nonetheless very interesting. (The poems themselves are neither here nor there.) This is *My Heart and My Flesh* (1927), a sort of sequel to *The Time of Man*, but entirely different from it in style and intent. Here the protagonist begins in more privileged circumstances, but suffers a series of savage blows. In many ways the novel anticipates Faulkner (q.v.) in its raw violence. Particularly interesting is the episode in which Theodosia, the heroine, finds herself compelled to share the company of Negroes and to share, as well, their hatred of their white oppressors. What fails in this unusual, and in certain respects pioneering, novel is the form in which the dialogue is presented: as in a play. This simply does not work – it seldom does in novels, which are, after all, not plays. *He Sent Forth a Raven* (1935) is also allegorical and experimental: it possesses great power in parts, but lacks control and coherence. Elizabeth Madox Roberts is a novelist who urgently requires reappraisal. Her style at its best is lyrical, her symbolism quite unforced; and she is greatly superior to many male novelists (Hemingway, q.v., is one example) who are much better known. As a portrayer of feminine sensibility and a regionalist who transcended regionalism with ease, she is undoubtedly a classic. She wrote two volumes of excellent short stories.



No fiction could have been further from Gertrude Stein’s (q.v.), or for that matter Elizabeth Madox Roberts’ (q.v.), than that of **Sinclair Lewis** (1885–1951); if they were super-literary, he was never more than super-journalistic. He is one of the worst writers to

win a Nobel Prize (he was the first American to do so, 1930), and the worst American writer to achieve fame on a more than merely popular level. Yet although he was in no way as serious as Gertrude Stein, he was in a certain sense as historically important as her. The son of a doctor of Sauk City, Minnesota, he went to Yale, became a journalist, and fell under the influence of the journalist and sometimes acute critic **H.L. Mencken** (1880–1956), an important debunker and satirist who, despite his crudities, was an often effective destroyer of hypocrisy, cant and pretentiousness. Mencken's trouble was his inconsistency and tendency to take the cheap, easy way out when 'demolishing' someone he disliked. However, the assertion, recently made, that he was a proto-fascist is absurd. It is simply that he had an unpleasant side to his nature. But there is much to enjoy in *Prejudices* and its successors.

Lewis wrote a number of realistic and partially satirical novels, but did not achieve recognition until *Main Street* (1920). This attacks Sauk City (here called Gopher Prairie) and every similar town in America on very much the same lines as Mencken and the critic George Jean Nathan (1882–1958) were currently doing in their magazine *The Smart Set* – but rather more ambiguously. For Lewis makes his symbol of freedom, Carol Kennicott, return to the dull doctor husband she has walked out on; not only that, but we can now see very easily that Carol Kennicott herself is an extremely sentimental and middlebrow creature – she is merely a bit smarter than the others. Lewis followed this with *Babbitt* (1922), a portrait of an average American business man which its readers took as satirical at the time, but which may now be seen as loving as well as critical. Still, this added a new word to the language. *Arrowsmith* (1925) is about a scientist, and *Elmer Gantry* (1927), by far his best novel, is an almost Dickensian extravaganza about the attractions of phoney religion and a fake preacher who takes advantage of them. *Dodsworth* (1929) is a sentimental novel on the obligatory theme of the American being educated in Europe. The books of Lewis' last twenty years are more overtly in favour of what he began by satirizing; but the tendency was always there.

Lewis appealed to so vast a readership because he was 'safe'. As he finally confessed, he had written of *Babbitt* with love and not with hate. He could oppose nothing to the materialism of the small towns he portrayed. He was intellectually feeble. His powers of characterization were nil. What, then, were his virtues? First, he had a masterly journalistic grasp of his material: he really knew about the society of which he wrote. And if he did not really hate it, he none the less depicted it with vitality. He owed something to Wells (q.v.), but most of all to Dickens. For essentially he was a caricaturist of great energy and zest. His readers were easily able to kid themselves that they were not like *Babbitt*; but the accuracy of his fine detail still fascinates – and in *Elmer Gantry* he has created a monster of Dickensian proportions and of some complexity. There was a true novelist in him, and his writing career is important in the development of American fiction.



**William Faulkner** (1897–1962), born in New Albany, Mississippi, and raised in Oxford in the same State, won the Nobel Prize nineteen years after Lewis (q.v.), and was the fourth American to do so (if Eliot, q.v., is regarded as British); he was incomparably the better writer; he is regarded by some, in fact, as the greatest of all American novelists. The claim is by no means absurd, though towards the end of his life he lost power and tended towards the production of punk. Faulkner joined the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1918,

after the American Air Force had rejected him because of his smallness (5 feet 5 inches); he did not see any active service, but was able to enter the University of Mississippi, for which he could not qualify academically, as a veteran. He stayed there for just over a year, and then took a variety of jobs. He worked on a newspaper and in 1924 published a book of poor, imitative verse called *The Marble Faun*. His first novel, *Soldiers Pay* (1926), published with the help of his friend Sherwood Anderson (q.v.), *fin de siècle* in style, is about a dying soldier's return. *Mosquitoes* (1927) is a mannered satirical book; no one would notice it now if it had not been Faulkner's second novel. In 1929 he published his first important novel, *Sartoris*. For this he drew on his family history (his great grandfather's colourful life was ended by a bullet fired by a rival only eight years before Faulkner's birth), and created the domain for which he became famous: Yoknapatawpha County, county seat Jefferson. This place has a relation to Lafayette County, and Jefferson has a relation to Oxford (and other towns, such as Faulkner's birthplace, New Albany). It is also Faulkner's 'world': a world as untidy as the real one as we actually have it in our minds, with geographical and historical exactitudes distorted – and as vivid as any created by a novelist in this century. Within this world, with certain inconsistencies that make it more rather than less convincing, Faulkner traced the decline of certain families (the Compson, Sartoris, Benbow and McCaslin families) and the rise of the Snopes. The scheme is a vast map of Faulkner's imagination: it blurs somewhat at the edges, and there are undefined areas – but, again, that is how we ourselves grasp history and hard unimagined fact; much is illuminated and illuminating.

Faulkner is an example of a writer who managed, for a period – of about twelve or fourteen years – to keep his powerful imagination dominant and under control. His genealogies and complex accounts of the 'history' of his region were essential parts of this process. He had to bring his internal world into line with the external world. In the end, and understandably, he gave way under the strain of maintaining his gloomy but not life-denying vision: his speech of acceptance of the Nobel Prize is dutiful, a series of clichés almost worthy of a politician, unworthy of the creative writer. The view implied in Faulkner's works is not the view expressed by the winner of the Nobel Prize: '... man will not merely endure: he will prevail ... because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance'. That may be true; but the way it is stated is empty because derivative and meaningless: the words are not Faulkner's own. The view of the best work is more sombre. It has been well summed up as follows: '... the Faulkner novel is designedly a silo of compressed sin, from which life emerges as fermentation'. Faulkner believed in no system; he was at his best when he tried to discover the patterns of his internal world – this is of course, in part, a result of the impact the external world made on him. The values of Christianity will do for him; but there is no evidence that he believed that God had ever intervened in human affairs. His late novel *A Fable* (1954), an attempt to re-enact Christ's Passion against the background of the First World War, is imaginatively an atrocious failure: laboured, its bitterness misplaced, its use of the Christ-theme palpably erroneous because of Faulkner's clear lack of belief in it.

His first wholly characteristic novel was *The Sound and the Fury* (1929). Here the Compson family are shown degenerating, fallen from their former gentility, leading a doomed life. The story is told through the consciousnesses of three members of this family: Benjy the idiot, the sensitive Quentin and the twisted, mean Jason. Quentin kills himself through shame at his incestuous desire for his sister Candace; Jason's is a tale of pettiness and greed. A final section centres on the Negro servant, Dilsey, whose goodness and wholesomeness contrast with the horror of the Compsons' decline. Caldwell (q.v.) can convey a mild sense of the lowness and crudity into which oppressed people can decline; Faulkner can show why they decline – and without oppression. But his vision of

evil is rich in the affirmation of the qualities which foil it, which produce guilt – which rise above it.

Faulkner made the interior monologue his chief technical device. He enters too bodily – and with a rare creative courage which cost him much – into his characters (white, black, successful, defeated) ever to speak confidently of men prevailing. His world is infinitely more complicated than the platitudinous one in which such utterances can be made.

Faulkner's best work was written between *The Sound and the Fury* and *Intruder in the Dust* (1948), the story of how a Negro is saved from lynching by a white boy who has grown into understanding and humanity. After this – which is itself seriously vitiated by the introduction of a character who will insist on interpolating his unconvincing theories about race relations into the narrative – although none of his books is without some virtue, Faulkner tended to make optimistic intellectual inferences from his earlier works and elevate those into a kind of moral system. The three finest novels of all came early in Faulkner's career: *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying* (1930) and *Light in August* (1932). *As I Lay Dying* deals with the last journey of Addie Bundren: in her coffin as her family – her husband, her three legitimate sons, her bastard and a pregnant daughter – carry her to Jefferson. When there her husband finds himself new teeth and a new wife. This is a great novel because it reads perfectly as a realistic novel, and yet its symbolic possibilities are infinite. *Light in August* sets the bastard Joe Christmas, who may be half Negro, but in any case feels and behaves as if he were, amongst a strict Calvinist community. This book touches, more closely than any of its predecessors, on one of Faulkner's main themes: that the doom and decline of the white man springs from his insane and self-defeating, and irrational, inability to treat the Negro as a fellow human being. This conviction – that all people should treat others as human beings – is one of the mainstays of Faulkner's creative impulse. It is not 'political', but merely human. But there are characters as primitive and evil, in Faulkner's books, as some Southern demagogues with whom we are familiar: he penetrates their minds with his understanding, too. His job is not to satirize or to make judgements: he presents people as they are, and he can do so. Although *Light in August* is a grim book, it is a positive one because it is made clear, from the beginning to the end, that Joe Christmas' tragedy is his refusal to take or give love, and that he got into this condition – from which he cannot escape – because he was originally denied love.

*Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) brings back Quentin Compson, who is preparing for suicide in *The Sound and the Fury*, but only as narrator. The story is of Thomas Sutpen, the 'demon' poor white who has ambitions to achieve aristocracy and destroys everyone who gets in his way. Sutpen marries a planter's daughter and they have a son (Charles), but he abandons them when he discovers they have Negro blood. He goes to Yoknapatawpha County, obtains land by dishonest means, marries again, and has a son and a daughter. Later his son Henry goes to the University of Mississippi and meets and admires Charles, not knowing who he is. Charles falls in love with his own half-sister, Judith – and it is Henry who kills him when he learns about his Negro blood. Then Henry disappears. Sutpen is obsessed with begetting a male heir, and when he abandons a poor white girl on his land because she bears him a daughter, her grandfather kills him with a scythe. Ultimately it is only Sutpen's Negro heirs who live on his land; in the end, finding the aged Henry come back and hidden in his own house, one of them burns it down. Thus Faulkner gives his most complete version of the doom of the South. Once again he spells out the message: the fatal flaw is its refusal to accept the Negro on equal terms. This working out of the flaw is presented with passion, for Faulkner truthfully shows it to come of a horrible innocence. A doctrinaire Marxist explanation of the South simply will not do – and it is Faulkner who shows this most clearly. It would be more comforting if it

would do. To have to report that this attitude to other human beings arises from an innocence is agonizing; but Faulkner, himself a Southerner, found the courage to tell the truth. There is a sense in which he had earned the clichés of his Nobel Prize acceptance. What else could he have said but read *Absalom, Absalom!?* *The Unvanquished* (1938) linked episodes previously published as short stories into a novel about the fortunes of the Sartoris family in the Civil War. There are many more short stories, collected in *These Thirteen* (1931), *Doctor Martino* (1934), *Go Down Moses* (1942), *Knight's Gambit* (1949) and then in *Collected Stories* (1950), in which there is at least one masterpiece, 'Burn Burning' – though the story form was not Faulkner's great strength. *The Wild Palms* (1939) relates the defeat, through love, of a New Orleans doctor who performs an abortion on his mistress. This is counterpointed with what seems to be a totally unconnected one: but the resonance between the two shows Faulkner at his technically most assured. There is also a revealing account of pulp writing – which Faulkner was himself forced to do.

*The Hamlet* (1940), *The Town* (1957) and *The Mansion* (1960) are a trilogy on the Snopes family; the first part is the best, but the second two contain the most humorous writing of Faulkner's latter years.

Faulkner is a very difficult, even forbidding writer. He is also, perhaps largely because of the strain and responsibility imposed upon him by his concern with the nature of evil, the most uneven of all the major writers of our time. His metaphors and similes can seem forced, and even jejune. He can be pretentiously complex. He can be portentous and confused. But his best work is not more difficult than it has to be. Those long and intricate sentences are not too long and intricate when they are describing the processes of a mind. Few techniques more effective in doing so have been evolved. The subject of the beauty and innocence contained in evil is a difficult and paradoxical one, which can lead to misunderstandings. The sheer energy of Faulkner's stories of perversion, horror and despair gives the lie to those who would accuse him of doing the dirty on life itself, for his own creative ends. He was forced to write scripts for Hollywood (one, *The Blue Dahlia*, with Raymond Chandler, q.v., is famous), and he was subject to fearful bouts of alcoholic dissipation. It is no wonder.



**F. Scott Fitzgerald** (1896–1940), born at St. Paul, Minnesota, was the laureate of the Jazz Age, of what Gertrude Stein (q.v.) called 'the lost generation'. These were people who were 'so deliberately and determinedly cynical that [they] became naïve'. Fitzgerald belonged to this age, and at times he indulged himself in it to the hilt, but he knew that it was all wrong. In *The Great Gatsby* (1925), he achieved a balance between empathy and analysis, and produced the most memorable and accurate description of the American Twenties – a devastating criticism that is none the less rich and romantic, for Fitzgerald was an out-and-out romantic, and it was in large measure his violently offended romanticism that produced his disgust.

He began as very much one of his age. His family was prosperous and when he went to Princeton in 1913 he was anxious to distinguish himself in every field including football; in 1920 he published his first successful novel, *This Side of Paradise*, which is about Princeton. Here Fitzgerald romantically sets his (immature) notion of true love against the corrupting power of money; the novel's strength, apart from its brilliant descriptive

passages, lies in Fitzgerald's convincing grasp of what is unselfish in his initially snobbish and hedonistic hero. Fitzgerald had married a beautiful girl, Zelda, and he now began to live it up in one plush hotel after another, going from party to party, consuming himself rapidly but of course, in his twenties, imperceptibly. Zelda wanted to be a ballet dancer – she was very good, but she had started too late, and was not mentally stable – and she insisted on competing with Fitzgerald, which upset him, tearing him in two directions. Eventually she entered an institution; she was in one – in America – when she was burned to death in an accidental fire in 1947. She did write one novel, which has recently been published; it is no good, though of course interesting. Fitzgerald, earning a lot of money but increasingly in debt, wrote two volumes of short stories, a novel – *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922) – and a play before his first masterpiece, *The Great Gatsby*. The action takes place in the valley of ashes, beneath the huge eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg (an advertisement). The story is told by Nick Carroway, a device that gives Fitzgerald the precise distance he needs between himself and his material. Poor Jay Gatz from Dakota quickly becomes one of the rich ('They are different from you and me. They possess and enjoy early, and it does something to them, makes them soft where we are hard, and cynical where we are trustful, in a way that, unless you were born rich, it is very difficult to understand') because he wants to win back Daisy Buchanan, Nick's cousin. After an affair with Jay when he was an army lieutenant, she had married the brutal, materialistic proto-fascist, Tom Buchanan – a marvellously prophetic portrait of an evil, ill-willed, vulnerable, vicious man. Through Nick Gatsby he meets Daisy again, and is able to make her his mistress. Tom takes a garage proprietor's wife for his mistress; her jealous husband locks her up, she runs out into the road – and is killed by Daisy, who does not stop. Gatsby takes the responsibility and Tom tells his own mistress's husband, Wilson, that it was Gatsby who killed her, and drove on. Wilson shoots Gatsby in his swimming-pool, and then turns the gun on himself.

*The Great Gatsby* is another of those seminal books – one of the most perfect of the century, and absolutely right-hearted – that manage to exist simultaneously and convincingly on both the realistic and the symbolic plane. Fitzgerald depicts the rich society into which Gatsby hoists himself as empty of all but putridity; the object of his simple romantic dreams, Daisy, is no more than a treacherous whore without the discrimination or inclination to diagnose the evil in her cruel and stupid husband. But Gatsby, as is often and rightly pointed out, comes, 'divided between power and dream', to represent America itself, and he (Nick says) 'turned out all right at the end; it is what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and short-winded elations of men'. Fitzgerald is able to see Gatsby as both an ex-criminal, vulgar member of the *nouveau riche*, and a dreamer: as the man who had believed in Daisy's (as it turns out corrupt) kiss so fervently that he had dedicated his whole being to what he thought it represented. In this way Gatsby embodies the famous – or notorious – 'American dream', which will (Fitzgerald implies) founder on its preference of appearance to reality.

*Tender is the Night* (1934; rev. 1951) is the love story of Dick Diver, psychiatrist, and his rich patient Nicole Warren. This is a more personal, more autobiographical book (for Nicole's mental illness he obviously drew on his experience of Zelda's); it does not have the universality of *The Great Gatsby*. It is none the less a masterpiece. The manner in which sick Nicole attracted Dick, and how she then corrupts him, is truly tragic. He loses his sense of vocation and becomes merely charming, a corrupted healer. Even though mentally ill and utterly dependent when she is sick, Nicole is somehow superior, the victor: she destroys her husband because in their marriage there is a tacit understanding that he is being paid for staying with her. In the end Dick returns to America, to – it is

implied – rot away and waste his substance. Unlike Gatsby, he survives to some sort of infamy and defeat.

The Thirties were bad years for Fitzgerald. He worked in Hollywood, drank too much, behaved in such a manner as to give inferior men the opportunity to pity him, and almost stopped writing. At thirty-nine, in 1936, he experienced what he himself called a crack-up: Edmund Wilson (q.v.) edited the interesting notebooks, papers and essays describing this nervous breakdown in the volume *The Crack-up* (1945): why, Fitzgerald asked himself, had he gone so far as to have become identified with all he loathed and pitied? He had a daughter by Zelda, and it is clear that he desperately wanted to appear to her as a good and decent father – and that he felt he could not do so. Luckily for his personal happiness he met a journalist, Sheilah Graham, who sweetened his difficult final years, and helped him to get himself into a fit state to attempt his last novel, *The Last Tycoon* (1941). Fitzgerald died, after two heart attacks, before he could finish it. Essentially it is a self-portrait: Monroe Stahr, a film-producer at the end of his rope, tries to struggle on although he no longer believes in life. It is clear that Fitzgerald's alcoholism and involvement with commerce had not weakened his powers, and if this had been finished it might be safe to agree with those critics who find it his best novel. Fitzgerald wrote many short stories, of varying merit; there is a selection of eighteen of the best of them in *The Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (1951).

**Ernest Hemingway** (1898–1961) also came from the Midwest – he was the son of an Illinois doctor – and, as Fitzgerald had done, but to much greater point, he sat at the feet of Gertrude Stein (q.v.) in Paris. As a young man he made many hunting and fishing expeditions; his descriptions of these activities were one of the high points of his writing. Hemingway was a reporter in Kansas City, volunteered as an ambulance driver and was wounded in Italy in 1917. He served with the Italian infantry until the Armistice. In Paris he came to know Gertrude Stein, Ford Madox Ford and Ezra Pound (qq.v.), all of whom encouraged him. (His memoirs of his Paris years were published posthumously in *A Moveable Feast*, 1964. This is an example of Hemingway at his worst: self-parodic, arch, vicious, envious, unfair about others and untruthful.) His early short stories were collected in *In Our Time* (1925). The tedious *The Torrents of Spring* (1926) parodied (or tried to parody) Sherwood Anderson's (q.v.) style – a style from which Hemingway had already appropriated what he wanted. *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), called *Fiesta* in Great Britain, his first novel, is his best. This was followed by the short stories *Men Without Women* (1927) and the novel *A Farewell to Arms* (1929); the short story collection *Winner Takes Nothing* (1933) was Hemingway's last book of account.

Hemingway was famous for his style, his four marriages (only the final one, lasting from 1944 until his death, took), and his various sporting exploits. The record is not very clear on his prowess as a sportsman. It seems that he was not always as good as he said or thought he was. When he went to the front in the Spanish Civil War he nearly killed someone with a grenade, and was regarded as a nuisance. But he could fish and he had enthusiasm for (though not a very good knowledge of) bullfighting. During most of the Thirties Hemingway lived in Key West in Florida. After the Second World War, during which he was a correspondent with the Fourth Division of the First Army, he lived on an estate near Havana, Cuba, until the Castro revolution. After this he settled in Idaho. But he was already mentally and physically ill, and in 1961 he shot himself in a fit of depression for which he preferred not to be treated. After 1933 his main publications were: *To Have and Have Not* (1937), *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), on the Spanish Civil War, the badly received *Across the River and into the Trees* (1950), *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), all novels, and *The Green Hills of Africa* (1935), on big game hunting. *The Fifth Column*, a hollow and cliché-ridden play about a newspaperman in Spain, was included in his

collected short stories: *The Fifth Column and the First Forty-nine Stories* (1938). A posthumously issued, excruciating novel, *Islands in the Stream* (1970), is best ignored. There may be more to come.

Hemingway, especially the late Hemingway, has been a vastly overrated writer; but this does not mean that he was not in some ways a good one. The earliest influence on him, **Ring Lardner** (1885–1933), whose style he was imitating at school, deserves a paragraph to himself.

Lardner was better known as a sports columnist than as a short-story writer. He did not fully realize his genius, but he was the first to listen properly to and carefully reproduce the speech of the lower classes, the speech of people who went to prize fights and baseball matches. He refrained from judgement, and his idea of what was comic was also very often (as he knew) tragic; he missed greatness because there was just a shade too much of the casual about his misanthropy. His lunatic short plays anticipate the Theatre of the Absurd, although they did not influence it. But Lardner had a greater and more secure sense of the decent than Hemingway. Lardner suffered from tuberculosis, and he drank himself more or less to death: he allowed himself to rot. But he knew it, and always there was a detached observer there. He is one of the finest purveyors of awfulness of our time, and he is this because, although he can never portray goodness, he can throw it into relief by his descriptions of awfulness: vulgarity, lovelessness, the sort of bad taste that really is bad (not innocent or ignorant), ruthlessness. He thought he was drawing desperate self-portraits; but he kept himself above this, in fact.

The mature Hemingway of the Twenties owed the authenticity of his dialogue and his toughness to Lardner's example; in the latter the toughness was unassumed, in Hemingway it functioned laconically and truthfully as a guard against sentimentality.

Hemingway's style was self-conscious and carefully worked out, but it arose from a simplicity of feeling – one that he gradually lost. Apart from Lardner, its sources are in the economy of the newspaper report, the purity of Gertrude Stein, the honesty and lyricism of Anderson, the innocence of Huckleberry Finn, the simplicity of Stephen Crane (qq.v.). The Hemingway of the Twenties is complex; but he has not yet fallen prey to cliché or to noisy exhibitionism about 'action'. He is not as much of a 'man' as he would like to be: the hero of *The Sun Also Rises* has been emasculated by the war. But he lives to a code – the famous Hemingway code of 'grace under pressure'. For Jake Barnes there can be no meaning in life except to live gracefully. He cannot have the girl he loves, Brett; but she returns to him at the end because the novelist Robert Cohn, to whom she has briefly given herself, has nothing to offer – he is the victim of mere words and fine sentiments – and because she fears she will injure the bullfighter she loves if she stays with him. This is Hemingway's most moving novel, fine in characterization, pellucid in style, and contrasting without sentimentality the anguish of futility with the dignity of a few people's graciousness. As he himself would then have conceded, it is not much because it is not enough; but it is very real and very poignant. *A Farewell to Arms* is poignant, too, but the English nurse, Catherine Barkley, is quite unreal. Aside from Brett in *The Sun Also Rises*, whom he observes but upon whose qualities he does not comment, Hemingway could not create women. There was, it seems, a homosexual component in his nature which led him both to want to establish himself as masculine (i.e. not 'feminine'), and to make up soft, yielding, sweet women – too obviously the ideal complement for strong and hairy warriors. Catherine is the beginning of this line of girls, who get younger and more improbable as his heroes age along with him. But apart from this, *A Farewell to Arms* – with its implied comments on the futility of war, its descriptions of battles, and its depiction of the state of mind of the hero – runs *The Sun Also Rises* very close.

The best short stories are in the first three collections. In them Hemingway was getting nineteenth-century culture out of his system, and saluting a primitivistic, non-industrial kind of life in which males (the females are out except for purposes of comfort, and as something a man 'needs') must learn to live and die with courage and grace: people must behave well. The best stories, particularly those about Nick Adams, are laconic and as pure as spring water. Hemingway's fascination with death (he chose it rather than life at the end) was genuine, and he is especially good in describing encounters with death.

But in many ways he never grew up. He lacked anything but the most temporary generosity. The kind of badness of his posthumous novel reveals him to have been capable of fantasies of action so puerile that it is hard to believe the author of *Fiesta* could have perpetrated them. His longest novel, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, has good passages, but is flawed as a novel by its meaningless and sentimental love affair. The symbolism of *The Old Man and the Sea* is portentous, its simplicity false. It is, it is true, a skilful performance, and – the Christian symbolism apart – a sincere one. It conveys Hemingway's message: life is futile, but we must still live it nobly and with courage. However, it is not fresh, but lucubrated; the words have not been drawn up from a deep well, but pondered and put together by the legendary image: 'Papa Hemingway'.

The message itself is not and never was much, of course. Hemingway will be valued, surely, for the discovery of a style that enabled him to make vivid, lyrical and piercingly accurate descriptions of graciousness and male companionship (as in the fishing trip in *The Sun Also Rises*). He is a moving writer, but it is an error to go to him for 'philosophy'.

Thomas Wolfe (1900–38) was less gifted than Hemingway (q.v.), and his failure to grow up was more comprehensive. But he cannot be ignored. He was born in Asheville, North Carolina, where his father made grave masonry and his mother ran a small hotel. A giant in height – he was six feet six inches tall – he poured out a gigantic torrent of thinly fictionalized autobiography which his publishers, first Maxwell Perkins of Scribners and then Edward C. Aswell of Harpers, edited into four books (themselves massive novels). He had graduated from the University of North Carolina and then gone to Harvard to try George Pierce Baker's (q.v.) course in playwriting. He took his first novel to Perkins in 1923, and between them they put it into shape – meanwhile Wolfe was an instructor of English at New York University. *Look Homeward Angel*, in which he appears as Eugene Gant, was published in 1929, and was immediately successful; it was followed by *Of Time and the River* (1935). In his next two novels, both posthumously published, Gant becomes George Webber. Shortly after delivering the Webber manuscript Wolfe caught pneumonia; he died of a brain infection. Aswell edited and published the material Wolfe had left as *The Web and the Rock* (1939) and *You Can't Go Home Again* (1940). Since his death Wolfe's reputation has somewhat declined – no competent critic recommends him wholeheartedly – but he is still read. Clearly, for all his lack of self-discipline and failure to consider any phenomenon or person except in the light of his own interests, he is a writer of some importance.

He is most important to the young. Go back to him after thirty and you will find yourself selecting; before thirty you take it all in. In the first novel Gant tells the story of his father and mother. Even as edited by Perkins it is badly, inflatedly written; but this does not seem to matter, because Wolfe does create an unforgettably vivid picture of a savagely quarrelling, mutually recriminative family. Probably he could not have done it in any other way. The continuation, and the unsuccessful attempt to cover the same ground more objectively in the Webber novels, tells his own story: of the search for success (rather than meaning), for a father (found in his editor Maxwell Perkins) and for a mother (found and finally repudiated in the stage designer Aileen Bernstein, almost

and it manifests the nihilism from which Dos Passos guiltily suffered all his life: he feared anarchy for the obvious reasons, and was not an anarchist; but even more he feared the society for whose portrayal he became so famous: he feared for the survival of the individual. In *Three Soldiers* he shows the destruction of three men by society; this he really, and reasonably, believed to be the fate of individual man in the twentieth century. But naturally enough he wanted to offer some hope, and so he turned to the portrayal of society itself, in the hope of reforming it. Whether he had read Romain's *Death of a Nobody* (q.v.) is not clear; but from *Manhattan Transfer* (1925) onwards his thinking had – or tried to have – something in common with unanimism (q.v.). He knew French literature well. But he could never make up his mind whether his entities with a life of their own were good or bad. However, one suspects that society itself was for Dos Passos an evil entity; he never, for all his reformist zeal and his active leftism of the Thirties, caught a sense of that authentic corporate life that is explored by the sociologist Durkheim. And, as *Three Soldiers* already makes clear, he could not create character: even his leading figures are types, and they are portrayed without psychological richness.

However, the naturalism of *Manhattan Transfer* and the trilogy *U.S.A.* (1938) escapes drabness for three reasons: his technique is lively as well as skilful; he is responsive to poesy, and had been exposed to imagism (q.v.) and other colourful new developments while at Harvard, so that his writing, too, is often gay and fresh; and although his creative imagination was deficient he was driven by real passions: passion against the injustices caused by the social and economic conditions between wars, and passion against the bigger injustice of life itself. For Dos Passos the naturalist gloom was all-pervading because he had no real imaginative life to set against it. His counterweight was provided by travel; and his travel books, particularly *Orient Express* (1927), are superb – at a time when his novels are, understandably enough, more known about than read, these travel books ought to be reissued.

The technique Dos Passos invented is very fine indeed, and I think it is still useful and valid. It has been utilized, notably, by Döblin and Sartre (qq.v.), both much superior as novelists to Dos Passos – but both fertilized considerably by his method. Dos Passos himself derived it mainly from Joyce (q.v.), but he added much of his own, and his approach, although lyrical, was realistic rather than introspective. He was not interested in language – his language is flat and unexciting – but social reality; Joyce's books are increasingly an investigation into language itself.

Dos Passos first used this technique in *Manhattan Transfer*, which deals mainly with the teeming life of New York City over a period of some years, and in particular with certain defeated individual lives. Dos Passos takes a number of characters and deals with the rise and fall of their fortunes in parallel (sometimes converging) episodes. These episodes are combined with three other devices: brief 'biographies' of important people (giving opportunities for irony when contrasted with those of poor people); the 'newsreel', a collage of headlines, phrases from popular songs, and so on, that define the general atmosphere; and 'the camera eye', in which the author himself enters the field, mixing prose poetry with impressionistic and stream-of-consciousness (q.v.) passages. These, with some exceptions, are the weakest passages in *Manhattan Transfer* and *U.S.A.*, which consists of *The 42nd Parallel* (1930), *1919* (1932) and *The Big Money* (1936), with a new prologue and epilogue. *U.S.A.* takes twelve characters and treats them with what Marcus Cunliffe well calls 'circumstantial unloving competence'. Each one is supposed to be subordinate to the life of the city; but Dos Passos does not succeed in concealing his despair – a rather sterile despair. His later books – among them the trilogy *District of Columbia* (1952), *Chosen Country* (1951) and the very poor *Most Likely to Succeed* (1954) – collapsed, doubtless from exhaustion, into facile phoney patriotism, flat reportage and a nearly

behaviour of human groups became less evident (especially in the religious and philosophical spheres). That this interest is fruitful we have seen from the sociology of Durkheim and the novels of Romains, to name only two writers; Steinbeck did add something of his own, in his insistence on bestowing a loving consideration upon all living things, even freaks – an attitude he opposed to morality. This produced the best of his novels, really a novella, *Of Mice and Men* (1937). Some of the characters are wooden, the symbolism is lubricated, Lennie's hallucinations at the end are wildly unconvincing; but the theme of the animal-child, the giant who does not know his own strength, protected by the little, intelligent, physically weak man, is not sentimental even though it is fundamentally homosexual (Lennie is led from 'good' non-sexual friendship to murder by vile uncomprehending women) – though unconsciously so.

Unfortunately Steinbeck did not realize the contradictions in which his unanimistic ideas involved him: why be sorry for the individual if the individual does not matter? Of course Steinbeck cared about the plight of individuals, and about injustice, and with *In Dubious Battle* (1936), the story of a strike of fruit-pickers, he aligned himself with the proletarian school. *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), about the Joad family which with thousands of others came to California to find work, is epic in proportion and gripping as narrative; the coming of the sharecroppers from the Oklahoma dustbowl to California is convincingly seen as a vast instinctive migration. Again, brilliant impressionistic writing is mixed in with some intolerably folksy sentimentality. But the novel's chief fault is that it does not cohere: Steinbeck makes it clear that he believes the behaviour of the profiteers in California is humanly inadequate, but he cannot show why; there is a conflict in him between the philosophical unanimist and the humane socialist. The book's message, that everything that lives 'is holy', is vitiated by its philosophy – and in any case it conveys this message not in imaginative but only in sentimental terms. Steinbeck's later books do nothing to resolve this paradox, and the ambitious *East of Eden* (1952), although it contains a few passages of good writing, is pretentiously symbolic.

Erskine Caldwell (1903), from Georgia, no less gifted, is too easily dismissed by critics today. Like Steinbeck (q.v.), Caldwell tends to deal in inarticulate or simple characters not only because he wants to depict people depressed by economic and social circumstances but also because he cannot create complex or articulate ones. However, his early work illuminated the lives of Southern poor whites in the Thirties – the backwoodsmen and sharecroppers, whose lives he knew well – in a way that they had never been illuminated before. In *Tobacco Road* (1932), a dramatization of which ran in New York for eight years, and *God's Little Acre* (1933), all these wretched and degraded creatures possess is sex. They have been so reduced by circumstances that they are only parodies of human beings – and Caldwell writes of them forcefully. That what he writes is sometimes very funny is (perhaps) sometimes beyond his own intention, but has a savagely ironic effect. Caldwell should not be judged by his later and frequently sensationalist and self-parodic novels, but by the two novels already mentioned and by *Journeyman* (1935), *Georgia Boy* (1943), *Trouble in July* (1940), about a lynching, and, an exception, the more recent *Miss Mamma Aimee* (1967). A few of his stories are excellent – they were collected in *Complete Stories* (1953) – especially 'Kneel to the Rising Sun' (1935), a tale of racism that has classic stature and ought to be better known than it is. The best of Caldwell will survive, and deserves to do so.

Nelson Algren (1909–81), once the lover of Simone de Beauvoir (q.v.), and written about by her in *The Mandarins*, was born in Detroit and reared in poverty in Chicago, his home for most of his life, and the scene of most of his novels. He was connected with the proletarian movement and its predecessor, naturalism, because his immature first novel, *Somebody in Boots* (1935), which sold only 758 copies, was deliberately Marxist – and

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friends of the daughter of his white employer. In a moment of panic he accidentally kills her. While in flight he kills his own girl. He is captured, tried and, after rejecting both Christianity and communism, is executed. What is interesting about *Native Son* is that its power comes, not from its revelation of society's responsibility for Bigger Thomas, but from its nihilism: clearly society is not altogether responsible for him, because he is shown as vicious even amongst his own equally underprivileged contemporaries. The power comes from his violent assertion of himself, his defiance of the whole city of Chicago, his final and terrible affirmation of his murderous self.

Wright followed this with *Black Boy* (1945), an autobiography, and his best and least confused book. This gives a clue to his nihilistic attitude, for in it he confesses to the extent of his horror of the Negro's collaboration with the white man to keep himself down. Since Wright had been brought up by a strict mother, a Seventh Day Adventist, he had felt doubly alienated in his childhood; when he grew up he was able to sublimate his self-hatred – usual in all creative people – in a generally critical attitude towards his people as a whole. He underestimated Negro culture; tended, in fact, if only by implication, to see the Negro as actually inferior because of his lack of self-assertion. Yet *Black Boy* is a masterpiece, a series of episodes that demonstrate with a terrible dramatic exactitude the predicament not only of the Negro, but of the artist who sees the ills in his society, is punished for it, and yet is of it.

After the Second World War, partly at the behest of Gertrude Stein (q.v.), who had liked a review, Wright settled in Paris. He remained in France until his premature death, at only fifty-two, from a heart attack. Wright was by then a famous man; much of his time was taken up entertaining visitors, travelling and lecturing. The books he wrote in these years did not fulfil the promise of *Native Son* and *Black Boy*. Robert Bone has summed him up admirably: he cannot, he points out, 'convincingly exorcise his demon. His sense of self is too deeply rooted in revolt. To opt for love is to give up his identity as a picaresque saint, metaphysical rebel, lonely outsider'. This explains the failure of his long novel *The Outsider*, which betrays his imagination because it is contrived, stilted, pompous – ultimately, egocentric and insensitive. Because industrialization had freed him from the stultifying traditions of the South, he came to invest too much in it – to ignore the evils inherent in it. But in the posthumous *Eight Today* (1963) there is one novella, dating from the early Forties, in which Wright wholly succeeded. It is called 'The Man Who Lived Underground', and it bears some close resemblances to Ralph Ellison's almost classic *The Invisible Man* (q.v.). Here Wright more or less abandons a painstakingly realistic surface, and concentrates on the sensations and consequences of being driven underground. His hero, Fred Daniels, resembles Bigger Thomas in that he breaks the laws of the white masters and defies them. Furthermore, unlike Bigger, he penetrates to the absurd centre of their inauthentic world, based as it is on exploitation and falsehoods. Here Wright's indignation goes well beyond the Marxist line: it reaches beyond the political. But Fred Daniels wants to integrate himself (as the expression goes): he tries to return, from the sewer where he has been living, to the world. But that white world does not know him, even when he confesses to the crimes he has committed. Eventually he is murdered by policemen, determined not to accept his reality, in his own sewer. On account of this story alone Wright must be given a place in the front ranks of modern American writers of fiction. But the first two books of *Native Son*, and parts of the third, and *Black Boy* also entitle him to this position.

Ralph Ellison (1914) was born in Oklahoma City, the son of a construction worker and tradesman who died when he was three, leaving his mother to support him, which she did by working as a domestic cleaner. Ellison was and has always been as interested in jazz as in literature. He played the trumpet in his school band, knew Hot Lips Page, is

**Nathanael West** (originally **Nathanael Weinstein**, 1903–40), who lost his own and his wife's life when he failed to stop for an oncoming car in California, was a close friend of many writers, including Farrell, William Carlos Williams and Fitzgerald (qq.v.), but his four novels were not greatly appreciated until the early Fifties. He drifted around in the late Twenties in such jobs as sub-managing or managing hotels; and for a time he edited the magazine *Contact* with Williams. He had spent some time in Paris in the mid-Twenties, and he thoroughly absorbed surrealism (q.v.) – but hardly ever reproduced it. He spent the last six or seven years of his life in Hollywood, a sexually solitary and perhaps tormented man. Then he met Eileen McKenney, the heroine of the silly book *My Sister Eileen* by Ruth McKenney; he married her and they had a few months of great happiness before they died in the car accident.

West was not a more powerful or poetic writer than Henry Roth, but he developed a wider range. His first book, *The Dream Life of Balso Snell* (1931), entirely ignored when it appeared, is nothing much in itself, although brilliant in promise. It is a fantasy inspired by surrealism, in which Balso Snell discovers, 'while walking in the tall grass that has sprung up around the city of Troy', Homer's 'ancient song'; he decides to enter the wooden horse, and discovers the 'posterior opening of the alimentary canal', by which he enters it, 'O Anus Mirabilis!'

West was not only original in his own right, but he was the original black comedian (and with a surer touch than any of his successors) – after all, *Miss Lonelyhearts* (1933) preceded Fuchs' (q.v.) first novel by a year. This is not his best book – *The Day of the Locust* (1939) is that – but because in it he discovered the procedures most suitable to his genius, it does sometimes reasonably seem to be. It is certainly a very good, and a very grim, book. The journalist hero is given the job of answering the 'lonely hearts' letters on a popular newspaper. He collapses under the pressure of the job and of the cynicism of his colleague Shrike ('Why don't you give them something new and hopeful? Tell them about art'). He needs to become nothing less than Jesus Christ; and he means it. But he perishes (crucified?), the accidental victim of a cripple whose wife he has seduced and whom he (too sentimentally?) wants to save.

The irony and terror of this was already beyond anything a specifically modern America had yet produced; and it was written from the centre of it. It is instructive to compare West's response to that of Fitzgerald (q.v.): the former was hardly an inferior writer – though he lacked Fitzgerald's psychological penetration, he compensated for this with his crackling energy. West's next novel, *A Cool Million, or The Dismantling of Lemuel Pitkin* (1934), was a departure from the realistic surface of *Miss Lonelyhearts*. It has been criticized, and probably underrated, because it adopts a parody of a woman's magazine style. It is sometimes a little jejune, but also very funny – and in the end horrific. There are still few more effective exposures of naïve 'Americanism' and capitalist optimism than this story of the honourable, trusting and parodically innocent Lemuel Pitkin, who loses an eye, his teeth, his scalp and his leg, and after being jailed and used as a tool for both communist and fascist conspiracies, is killed and becomes a martyr in the fascist cause. It disappoints only because it fails to transcend its immediate object – the Horatio Alger legend of the rise to fame and fortune of the honest poor boy – and become a major work of the imagination. It may have been influenced by Ransom's (q.v.) famous poem 'Captain Carpenter'. The same cannot be said of West's last novel, *The Day of the Locust* (1939). This was composed in a straightforwardly realistic style, and with the great economy West had by then achieved. Despite its refusal to compromise facts or situation or character with sentiment or, indeed, with emotion of any kind and despite the despair which pervades it, *The Day of the Locust* is redolent with pity and understanding as well as the terror of the previous books. The events he depicts are outrageous – he knew and