



TARTU STATE UNIVERSITY

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**THE PATTERN
OF AMERICAN
LITERATURE**

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FOREWORD

The aim of this brief introduction to American literature is to provide a simplified outline which may serve the student as a sort of general guide, helping him to systematise in his own mind materials that might otherwise seem too complicated and too vast to be readily assimilated.

On no account is it to be regarded as a survey of the most important aspects or writers. On the contrary, many of the outstanding writers (such as Twain, Howells, James, London, Dreiser, Hemingway etc.) and groups (the first generation of American naturalists, the so-called 'Lost' generation, the southern school of writers, the conformist novel, the 'Beat' generation, etc.) are barely mentioned, while more space has been devoted to minor figures which do not receive separate treatment elsewhere. In other words it is not a substitute for lectures. No chapter supplies adequate treatment of any given subject; no section constitutes the answer to an exam question. At the same time the historical, social and economic background has been deliberately reduced to a minimum, though it is, in fact, the key to the whole system. In other words, what we have is a mere pattern and its sole function is to help the student to co-ordinate and memorise the information he receives in lectures and in his independent studies, to enable him, so to speak, to 'place' a given writer or a given work within the general framework or structure of American literature.

Here there is an obvious danger of oversimplification which may easily lead to a distortion of the truth. In

such a fluid, diffuse and subtle a phenomenon as literature any attempt to formulate a coherent scheme must inevitably do violence to both author and work. None of the generalisations here presented should be regarded as a statement of absolute truth. They are nothing more than suggestions, tentative explanations of a given literary phenomenon which are put forward with the object of stimulating thought and indicating significant relationships. Literature, in fact, cannot be reduced to a system. Any given work, however programmatic, will overlap the most carefully formulated definition; any given author will reveal a number of individual traits that will bring him into apparent conflict with the school to which he belongs. Writers frequently change their attitude in the course of a long career. They may reflect a number of external influences. They may undergo radical changes both in their technique and in their conception of literature, and they may even abruptly change their social and political views (as in the case of Sinclair Lewis, East, Wright, Dos Passos and so many others). In such conditions any attempt to define or limit their aesthetic and ideological principles must at best be provisional.

This applies to the problem of periodisation in particular. No complete and detailed periodisation is available in any of the standard works of reference, published either abroad or in the Soviet Union, and the present outline - which is admittedly open to challenge on all sides - should be regarded as a makeshift which, for want of a better, may stimulate the student to reach his own conclusions.

What is true of the division in time is also true of the division in space. In a country so large as the United States, where there are such wide divergences in social relations and cultural traditions, no attempt to cut up

literature into water-tight regional compartments can be regarded as final. True, there is a general, and highly significant, tendency to develop along regional lines. But no individual author can be satisfactorily disposed of along these lines. Poe was a southerner, but his work has been recovered from fifty cities scattered throughout the country. Twain was a westerner, but most of his work was written in the east.

Neither is the grouping proposed to be taken too literally. With the possible exceptions of the Hartford Wits, the New England school, the early naturalists and perhaps also the so-called 'Beat' generation of the 1950s, none of the schools or groups distinguished were united by the possession of conscious common aims, or even striking similarities in method or subject-matter. There was actually no such thing as a 'Knickerbocker School' at the beginning of the 19th century; and while nobody would care to discard the label of the so-called 'Lost' generation, it certainly never existed in the form of an organised group of writers.

Nevertheless, all such conceptions, whether they apply to writers, groups, regions or periods, serve as convenient 'handles' and as such are indispensable to the student of American literature. They help us to cope with the vast - and rapidly growing - stores of literary data and help us to introduce order into what would otherwise be a chaotic and amorphous mass. Above all they bring to the surface the underlying ideological currents of literature and reveal its connections with the concrete social problems of the world we live in.

Although, in a sense original, this outline does not pretend to originality, nor will it often be found to differ sharply in any essential respect from any of the

available general surveys of American literature, whether published abroad or in the Soviet Union. It is not a piece of research work (for which it entirely lacks the necessary documentation), but a simple aid or supplement to the University course on foreign literature, intended to guide the student in his practical task of orientation among the materials to hand.

The outline is preceded by an introductory discussion of the conception of American literature. The earlier periods (up to 1870) have been somewhat more summarily dismissed, partly because they are less rich from the literary point of view and consequently easier to systematise, and partly because they are of less interest to the modern reader.

For the sake of convenience (in order to avoid undue complication) modern poetry and the drama have been treated separately, and a brief note on Negro literature has been added at the end. But on the whole the same divisions will be found to apply as in the main section.

Individual writers have, as a rule, not been discussed, but a rough attempt has been made to differentiate them on the grounds of their importance to the student. The names of the more conspicuous or typical figures have been underlined. Those marked with an asterisk are treated as subjects in themselves for the purposes of the University course and most of the work in the lecture-room is devoted to them. All such guides to relative importance are indicated only once, in the period or section to which the writer in question primarily belongs.

THE CONCEPTION OF AMERICAN LITERATURE

For practical purposes we shall treat as American literature the English-language literature written on the territory of the United States or by writers living abroad who regarded themselves as Americans or were regarded as such by their readers. This excludes, for example, Amerind culture and the theme of the New World in the Elizabethans (Shakespeare, Lodge, Drayton), but includes the expatriates some of whom (like T.S.Eliot) were naturalised as foreign citizens. We should remember that the very category of American citizenship did not exist before 1776, and it did not prevent Hawthorne in 1863, almost a hundred years later, from referring to England as "Our Old Home".

But even within these delimitations American literature is not always easy to define. There is nothing surprising in this particular fact, and similar examples may be found in other parts of the world. It is by no means a simple matter to distinguish between Irish and English literature, or between the literatures of China and her neighbours in the Far East who assimilated Chinese culture and Chinese writing.

Various dates may be proposed, for various reasons, as the starting-point of American literature:

1. 1607, when the first permanent British settlement was founded at Jamestown;

2. 1700, which marks the beginning of the conflict between the colonies and the British government (from this onwards the Americans became acutely conscious of the differences of interest, and consequently of cultural

tradition which separated them from England);

3. 1776, the date of the Declaration of Independence;
4. 1830, about which time Washington Irving and Fenimore Cooper were appealing to a wide reading public in Europe - the first American authors to do so;
5. the 1880s, when the Frontier movement inaugurated a genuine American prose idiom;
6. and finally the 1920s, when American literature not only asserted its independence but in many respects assumed for the first time a leading role in the literature of the world. In reality all of these dates may be regarded as successive stages in a long and continuous process in the course of which American literature achieved maturity and equal recognition in its own rights.

As will be seen, this process was a protracted and painful one. Already in the Revolutionary period Phillip Freneau - the "father of American poetry" - had referred with despair to the sanctity of British culture:

"Can we never be thought
To have learning or grace
Unless it be brought
From that damnable place?"

and towards the end of the 19th century the great English critic Matthew Arnold repudiated the very idea of an independent American literature. Arnold's attitude was not restricted to Britain: it was echoed by the general frame of mind in the United States. Cooper had been painfully aware of the differences between American and European culture, but he makes no claims for a separate national literature. The authoritative Bostonians (Longfellow, Lowell and Holmes), who dominated - almost monopolised - American literature for half a century, looked to Europe for examples and inspiration and would certainly have smiled at the thought that the United States

might ever claim to possess its own literature, as distinct from that of Britain. About the same time Mark Twain was demonstrating in fact that the Americans possessed not only their own literature, but also their own language. But he was far from realising himself what he was doing, and it was a long time before his work and that of his companions could be dignified by the name of 'literature'..

There were many reasons for this hesitation and delay: the lack of an accepted cultural tradition; the uncontrolled and chaotic expansion of capitalist economy; the amazingly rapid assimilation of new territories (at the time of the War of Independence the colonies had occupied only a narrow strip of land on the Atlantic seaboard); the confusion produced by mass multinational immigration: America was not a nation, but a 'melting-pot of nations'. Other causes were of a more direct and practical nature. It was not until 1891 that the United States recognised the principle of international copyright. Up to this time, American authors were unprotected; and, still worse, the works of English writers were unscrupulously pirated in mass editions. Half a million volumes of Scott were issued in America between 1814 and 1823. This aspect of the 'American way of life' was one of the circumstances that so infuriated Dickens when he was unable to reach an agreement with the American publishers during his first trip to the United States in 1842. Meanwhile, the American author, who naturally expected to be paid, was at a disadvantage and found it difficult to market his work. Some of Cooper's work was published at 25 cents a volume, and Cooper himself pointed out that "the fact that an American publisher can get an English work without money must... have a tendency to repress a national literature".

These difficulties have long since disappeared: nobody nowadays would call into question the existence of an

independent national literature in the United States, and American authors expect to be paid reasonable fees for their work. But they left their mark on the historical development of American literature, and the student would do well to bear them in mind before passing on to consider the problems of classification and periodisation.

E A R L Y A M E R I C A N L I T E R A T U R E

Here we may distinguish between three main epochs: 1. the Colonial Period (1607-1764); 2. the Revolutionary Period (1765-1809), and 3. the Romantic Period (1810-1865).

Even in fixing these broad divisions we run into certain difficulties. Factually the Colonial Period comes to an end in 1776, with the Declaration of Independence. But the change in the ideological climate comes earlier and the real turning-point is 1765, when the Stamp Act and the Billeting Act were enforced and the chief revolutionary caucus - the Sons of Liberty - was organized. Thus on the whole we have a period of growing resistance and intensification of the conflict up to 1764, passing into a new period, one of open struggle, in 1765. This leads rapidly to the 'Boston tea party' (1773), the First Continental Congress (1774) and the commencement of large-scale military activities in 1775.

The end of the Revolutionary Period is more difficult to determine and the arrangement suggested is largely a matter of convenience. The bourgeois-democratic revolution, known as the War of Independence, was followed by a period of reaction typified by the brutal suppression of the Shays revolt of 1786-7. After the adoption of the Constitution in 1789, Federalist rule was aimed at the perpetuation of class privilege, thereby laying the foundations for modern, capitalist forms of exploitation. Nevertheless it seems expedient to extend the limit of the Revolutionary Period to include the Jefferson administration (1801-9), which marks a partial return to the ideal of democracy coupled with a certain effort to reassert and consolidate the gains of the revolution. This is further justified by

the fact that the aspirations of the masses lived on during the period of reaction; for once an ideological superstructure has taken definite shape it tends to persist by reason of its own vitality. Furthermore such an arrangement saves us from the danger of making arbitrary divisions in a literary scene which is exceptionally intricate, full of initiatives which remain undeveloped and intersected by a number of contradictory currents.

Still more confused is the conception of American romanticism. It clearly begins in the poetry of Freneau and Charles Brockden Brown's brilliant series of Gothic novels (1798-9), which made such a deep impression on Shelley. Both of these fall squarely within the Revolutionary Period. But Freneau and Brown were both pioneers far in advance of their time and, whatever their influence abroad, they had little or no immediate following in their own country. The classic tradition in poetry survived long after Freneau, and Brown was followed by Brackenridge and Irving, who revert to the traditions of the Enlightenment. Romanticism is re-established, this time more permanently, in the boisterous youthful novels of Fenimore Cooper with their strong feeling for nature, their idealised characterisation and their sentimental approach. A second romantic generation may be distinguished in the figures of Poe, Hawthorne and Melville, all of whom - in spite of their obvious differences - are characterised by a certain mystic element and a sense of tragedy, an 'awareness of evil', to use the stock term of modern American criticism.^I

^I An interesting comparison might be made with the two 'generations' of English romanticism, of which the first (Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey) is predominantly reactionary, while the second (Byron, Shelley, Keats and most of the minor writers of the romantic period) is fundamentally revolutionary or progressive.

A third, more conventional generation, perhaps better designated by the term 'post-romanticism', may be identified with the Boston or New England school. There are certainly other tendencies in the period in question - transcendentalism and the abolitionist movement, to mention two outstanding examples - which cannot be fully defined in terms of romanticism, although they exhibit clear points of contact with it. Moreover, romanticism is by no means exhausted in 1865. There is a strong dose of romanticism in the naturalists (especially Norris), and elements of romanticism persist everywhere in modern literature. In fact, romanticism is a permanent quality of literature and art, and cannot be confined to any one period. But, for all that, the three waves of romanticism indicated above may be said to constitute the mainstream of American literature between 1810 and 1865. During this period it dominates the literary scene, whereas both before and afterwards it occupies a subordinate position.

There is little need to comment on the closure of the third period in 1865. This coincides closely enough with 1870, the general division in world literature to mark the advent of imperialism. The latter is useful as a broad, international line of demarcation. But occasionally minor adjustments have to be made. No national culture is isolated from the rest, but each develops in its own local conditions. In the case of the United States the natural boundary is clearly 1865 (the end of the Civil War). Thanks to her possibilities of internal development America was the last great capitalist power to enter the arena of military struggle for the re-division of the world, and it was not until the Spanish War of 1898 that the aggressive nature of American imperialism was finally unmasked.

Having thus settled the main divisions of Early

American literature, we may proceed to fill in the pattern as follows:

I The Early Colonial Period (often, not inaptly, styled the Puritan Age)(1607-1700). It includes:

1. The chroniclers: John Winthrop^I (1588-1649), William Bradford (1590-1657);
2. The first printed works: The 'Bay Psalm Book' (1640) and the 'New England Primer' (1687).
3. The so-called 'theocrats': John Cotton (1585-1632) and the 'Mather dynasty': Richard Mather (1596-1669), Increase Mather (1639-1732), Cotton Mather (1663-1728).
4. The democratic opposition: Thomas Hooker (1586-1647), Roger Williams (1604-1684).
5. Records of the Indian wars: John Mason (c. 1600-1672), Daniel Gookin (1612-1687), William Hubbard (1621-1704), Mary Rowlandson (c. 1635- c. 1678).
6. Satire, from both a puritan (Nathaniel Ward 1579-1652) and an anti-puritan (Thomas Morton 1594-c. 1650) standpoint.
7. Poetry: Michael Wigglesworth (1631-1705), Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672), Edward Taylor (c. 1644-1729).
8. The only outstanding representative of southern culture during the Early Colonial Period is Capt. John Smith (1580-1631), one of the founders of the Virginian colony.

II The American Enlightenment (1700-1764).

On the whole the American Enlightenment was, especially in its later stages, far more militant and critical

^I Names of the more important authors are underscored; those marked with an asterisk(*) require special treatment as separate questions, or part-questions. It should be borne in mind that the important names are underlined only once, in the place to which they basically belong.

than the Enlightenment in England. This is due to the fact that the bourgeois revolution in England had already taken place and resulted in the compromise of 1688, whereas in America the Enlightenment was part and parcel of the revolutionary struggle itself and became more and more active as the period of open conflict approached. The influence of Voltaire and the great French materialists of the 18th century grew steadily stronger and reached its climax in the following period. Indeed, the revolutionary epoch was actually the continuation or, rather, the culmination of the Enlightenment movement. Jefferson is no less a representative of the Enlightenment than Franklin - whose work, incidentally, also extends into the revolutionary period.

The following subjects deserve special attention:

1. The survival of puritan dogma (Jonathan Edwards 1703-58) and the growth of rationalism (John Wise 1652-1725).

2. Personal records, descriptive literature, travels: Samuel Sewall (1652-1730), Sarah Kemble Knight (1666-1727), William Byrd (1674-1744).

3. The rise of journalism.

4. The literary, social, political, philosophical and scientific activities of *Benjamin Franklin (1706-90), who remains the central representative of the American Enlightenment.

III The Revolutionary Period (1765-1809).

The Revolutionary Period is, perhaps naturally enough, one of the most chaotic in the history of American literature. Historically it falls into four stages: (i) the maturing of the political crisis (1765-74);

(ii) the War of Independence (1775(6)¹-1781(3)², which must be regarded as a genuine bourgeois-democratic revolution; (iii) the ensuing period of reaction under Federalist rule (1784-1800); and (iv) the Jefferson administration (1801-9). From the literary point of view it was marked by a number of new developments, not all of which were immediately followed up. It produced the first American novels, but failed to create a tradition. It also produced the first American plays, among them a fresh and original comedy, Bayall Tyler's (1757-1826) "The Contrast", staged at New York in 1787, although the birth of an independent national drama can hardly be placed before the advent of O'Neill in 1916. For the first and perhaps only time in the whole history of American literature poetry takes precedence over prose. The main divisions are:

1. The political controversy: Hector St. Jean de Crèvecoeur (1735-1813), Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), *Thomas Paine (1737-1809); James Otis, John Adams, John Dickinson, Alexander Hamilton and others.

2. Poetry: (i) Folk songs and ballads of the revolution; (ii) the Hartford Wits: John Trumbull (1750-1831), Timothy Dwight (1752-1817), his brother Theodore Dwight, David Humphreys, Lemuel Hopkins, Richard Alsop; alone of the group Jeel Barlow (1754-1812) defended the principles of democracy after the war. (iii) Another consistent democrat was the first romantic poet in American literature, *Philip Freneau (1752-1832).

3. The first American novel was Sarah Morton's "The Power of Sympathy" 1789, and it was followed by other

¹ The first date marks the opening of hostilities; the second, the adoption of the Declaration of Independence by the Second Continental Congress.

² The first date marks the cessation of hostilities; the second the conclusion of the peace treaty.

sentimental romances by women writers (Susannah Rowson, Hannah Foster). But the first truly original work of fiction was "Modern Chivalry" (published serially 1792-1815) by Hugh Henry Brackenridge (1748-1816), while the transition to romanticism was effected in the remarkable spate of Gothic novels published in the last two years of the century by Charles Brockden Brown (1771-1810).

IV. The First Romantic Generation (1810-1830).

The problem of American romanticism has been touched on above and here we need only add a few remarks on the three writers who may be grouped together under this head. This is all the more necessary as they may appear at first sight to have little in common. They are *Washington Irving (1783-1859), *Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851) and the New England nature poet William Cullen Bryant (1794-1878). The work of all three, especially Bryant, overlaps the 1830 limit, but it would not be unfair to say that their significant contribution to American literature is largely contained within the period in question. Irving is a transitional figure and the bulk of his writing clearly belongs to the tradition of the 18th-century Enlightenment, but there are notable romantic elements in his later sketches, native American legends and Spanish materials. On the other hand Cooper and Bryant are preponderantly romantic writers and their sensitiveness to nature, though anticipated by Freneau, strikes one in the context of the period as a significant new quality.

All three writers - especially Irving - were associated at one time or another with New York, which was at the beginning of the 19th century the chief publishing centre in the country. As a result they have been connected with the so-called 'Knickerbocker School', named after the character of Diedrich Knickerbocker in Irving's "History of New York" (1809). Many other writers, including

James Kirke Paulding (1778-1860) were also connected with New York; but apart from the Irving circle, to which Paulding also belonged, they never formed a coherent group and the term 'Knickerbocker school' seems to be of little significance from the point of view of the evolution of American literature.

V The 'explosion' of 1830-50.

The next twenty years were among the richest and most varied in American literature. The 1830s initiated a period of social upheaval and stormy changes. Many factors contributed to the general atmosphere of instability: the sudden acquisition of vast new territories in the south and west - the real discovery of the New World¹; the meteoric and irregular growth of capitalist economy with its economic crises and financial panics; and the flood of immigration which swelled from 600,000 in the twenties to 2,600,000 in the fifties. These conditions produced a state of social unrest and intellectual ferment. The spontaneous beginnings of the labour movement date from about this time, and United States was the experimental ground of utopian socialism, with colonies of various types ranging from New Harmony in Indiana to the North American Phalanx in New Jersey, and extending in time right up to Upton Sinclair's Helicon Home at the beginning of the 20th century. Perhaps the most important from the literary point of view was Brook Farm (1841-6), nine miles from Boston, which was attended by Hawthorne and many of the Transcendentalists.

¹ Thirteen new states were carved out of the Louisiana territory purchased from France in 1803. Florida was ceded by Spain in 1819. The Mexican War of 1846-8 confirmed the annexation of Texas and Oregon, and added California, Arizona and New Mexico. Alaska was purchased from Russia in 1867.

In these circumstances literature was dispersed over a wide area; and the number of significant cultural centres was multiplied. In addition to New York we have to reckon with Concord, the headquarters of the Transcendentalist movement; the Boston-Cambridge axis, which sustained the all-powerful New England school; Philadelphia, the old centre of the Enlightenment, which fostered the talented social novels of George Lippard (1822-54), who broke fresh ground in his studies of city life and the rise of the financial oligarchy; the Far West, with its racy folklore and legendary heroes, such as Daniel Boone (1734-1820) and David Crockett. San Francisco in particular was to become the springboard of many of the great names in American literature (Mark Twain, Bret Harte, Jack London, Frank Norris, Ambrose Bierce, Upton Sinclair).

This centrifugal tendency naturally accentuated the diversity of ideological trends produced by the warring elements of social and economic life. On the whole five main currents can be distinguished in literature:

1. Transcendentalism, which may be roughly defined as a sort of diffuse critique of the capitalist system from an idealistic standpoint, is represented by Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-82), Henry Thoreau (1817-62), Margaret Fuller (1810-50), Amos Bronson Alcott (1799-1888), and George Ripley (1802-80).

2. The southern group of novelists (John Pendleton Kennedy 1795-1870, William Gilmore Simms, 1806-70; John Esten Cooke, 1830-86) followed, with less originality, the example set by Cooper and produced a large quantity of historical romances, most of which were set in the revolutionary period.

3. The anguish and uncertainty of the epoch is better expressed in the work of three outstanding writers: *Edgar Allan Poe (himself a southerner - 1809-49), *Nathaniel

Hawthorne (1804-64) and *Herman Melville (1819-91), who, in spite of their difference in temperament, can be linked together under the general designation of the Second Romantic Generation. They are unequal (often shockingly so). But their work is permeated by a sense of innate tragedy which anticipates the brooding fatalism of the 'Lest' generation and has led to their spectacular rediscovery, after a long interim of neglect, by the American critics of the twentieth century.

The romantics must also be given the credit of 'creating' the short story, as distinct from the sketches and anecdotes of the Enlightenment.¹ But working as they did along the lines of the Gothic novel and the sentimental romance, they were equally far removed from the terse, realistic, typically 'American' type with which we are familiar nowadays.

4. In this period, too, we must place the rise to prominence of the New England writers *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-82), Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809-94) and *James Russell Lowell (1819-91), who made Boston the literary capital of the United States.² The 'Brahmins', as they are sometimes called, were the literary dictators of their day, but their reputation has since abruptly declined. To the modern reader they seem prim and self-satisfied (all three were professors of Harvard University), tainted with the curse of 'Victorian' respectability. Certainly they modelled themselves on Europe and shrank from the homely, democratic element in American culture.

¹ Irving marks the transition with 48 tales of various kinds. Hawthorne wrote over 100 short narratives; Poe and James Kirke Paulding about 70 pieces.

² The influential 'North American Review' (founded 1815) and 'Atlantic Monthly' (founded 1857) were published here.

Nevertheless these weaknesses should not be overemphasised. Even Longfellow introduced - however stiltedly - a genuine new national element in his ballads and in his treatment of Indian folklore, while there is nothing refined or academic about the truculent Yankee idiom of Lowell's "Biglow Papers" or the informal humour of "A Fable for Critics" (both printed in 1848).

More substantial and enduring was the massive achievement of the New England historians William Prescott (1796-1859), John Motley (1844-77) and Francis Parkman (1823-93).

5. The fifth current, which steadily gathers force throughout the period in question, is the Abolitionist Movement, which for a time drew even the Transcendentalists and the Brahmins into the maelstrom of social struggle. About 1850 the movement enters into a new phase, in which the antagonisms of the past assume the quality of an organised conflict. From this time onwards Abolitionism becomes the central issue in American literature and may be conveniently detached to form a new period. It marks therefore, roughly speaking, the final stage in the evolution of romanticism and the transition to realism.

VI Abolitionism and the Civil War (1850-65).

As we have seen, the years 1850^I-65 represent only one phase of the abolitionist struggle. The movement itself cannot be limited in time or space. It is one of the permanent themes of American culture. Sewall's

^I 1850 was the date of the Fugitive Slave Act, by means of which the South attempted to enforce the legislation of slavery throughout the whole territory of the United States. It opened the phase of direct conflict which made the Civil War inevitable.

pamphlet "The Selling of Joseph" (1700) has been called the first abolitionist tract in American literature; and in a changed form the movement persists at the present day, becoming once again in the 1960s, a hundred years after the Civil War, the key problem of American 'democracy'. Negro slavery was formally abolished in 1865, but the underlying principle of racial equality is still an ideal - not a reality - in the United States. Nor is abolitionism confined to any single region; it affected every corner of the country. The names of John Brown and Abraham Lincoln belong to history rather than to literature. But those of the great agitators William Lloyd Garrison (1805-79) and Wendell Phillips (1811-84) cannot be ignored. Abolitionism produced its own folk songs and its own newspapers (especially Garrison's 'Liberator' 1830-65). It finds expression in the works of Emerson, Thoreau, Longfellow, Lowell, Bret Harte, Whitman, Mark Twain and many others. It supplied the main inspiration of the New England poet James Greenleaf Whittier (1807-92) and gave the world two great American novels: Richard Hildreth's (1807-65) "White Slave" (1836, enlarged 1852) and *Harriet Beecher-Stowe's (1811-96) "Uncle Tom's Cabin" (1852).

Inevitably, the war period and the ensuing confusion and desolate years of reconstruction have little to show in the way of literature. The southern poet Sidney Lanier (1842-81) seems a lonely and frustrated figure, hampered by the lack of a valid tradition and oppressed by a sordid and dehumanised unreceptive environment. But at the same time two of the most original figures in American poetry were working in the background. *Walt Whitman (1819-1892) first published his "Leaves of Grass" in 1855, but continually revised and extended it in later years (a tenth edition appeared in 1891). *Emily Dickinson's (1830-1886) poems did not appear in print till 1890,

fourteen years after her death. The story of their startling impact on American literature - in Whitman's case on world literature - belongs to the twentieth century. Diametrically opposed in temperament as they were, unacknowledged, almost unnoticed, they inaugurated a new era.

Nevertheless, as we have seen, the Civil War itself produced little that could be compared with the rich literary harvest of earlier abolitionism. It was too vast a calamity to be assimilated and transmuted in terms of literature, especially of a literature that had not yet discovered itself, that was still groping after its own national consciousness, its own language and means of expression. The poems of Whitman and Melville were received in silence. Only two outstanding prose writers - Bierce and Crane - really came to grips with the subject, but their war stories were written in the nineties, about thirty years later.

THE PROLOGUE TO THE
MODERN PERIOD (1870-1917)

Preliminary remarks. At first sight, the extension of the term 'modern literature' to cover the last hundred years may seem difficult to justify. But it is used in its broadest sense - the sense of literature that has an immediate appeal for the twentieth-century reader. This is certainly true of writers like Dreiser, London and Norris, or even Twain, James and Howells. When we read their books we do not have to adjust ourselves to the 'period', to make concessions to an outmoded code of habits or ideas, or to make allowances for an antiquated style, as we have to do in the case of Hawthorne, say, or Cooper. From this point of view they are still 'modern': we can appreciate them directly and need make little or no conscious effort to bridge the lapse of time. They do not 'date' so obtrusively as, for example, Hardy, Meredith or Butler - even for the British reader; and this difference is the measure of rapidly changing inter-relations of English and American literature. If Dreiser seems distressingly awkward (as he always has done), this is plainly due to the German element in his style rather than to any outmoded habit of thought.

At the same time it cannot be denied that most of the earlier writing of the modern period is no longer quite 'contemporary'. To a certain extent it has lost touch with the topical problems of the day, the latest fashions in thought and language. We are not always aware of this deficiency, but it exists none the less.

Similar differences - though more subtle - make

themselves felt when we compare books written before and after the Second World War.

On these grounds we may conveniently divide modern American literature into the following three basic periods:

I. A period of preparation 1870-1917 (1865-1918), which marks the formation of the national tradition and the triumph of realism; II. The Interbellum and the Second World War (1919-1945), during which American literature overtakes Europe at one stride and emerges as one of the leading forces in modern world culture; and III. Recent American Literature (i.e. the fifties and sixties).

The last two sections can - again for purposes of convenience - be lumped together under the general heading of 'The Twentieth Century'. Here, too, a word of explanation is perhaps necessary. Formally speaking, the 20th century begins in 1900. But it is obvious that the years immediately preceding the First World War face both ways, not only forwards into the future, but also backwards into the past. With all their innovations and undisputed originality, London and the 'muckrakers', the naturalists and Dreiser's early novels, belong essentially to the age against which they revolt. They represent a sort of extension of the former period and the decisive cleavage takes place not in 1900, but in 1917(8).

We may now consider the principal internal divisions of the first epoch, in which it is possible to distinguish three main phases:

I. The formation of a national tradition and the transition to realism (1865-1890).

The period following the Civil War marks a sharp cleavage - perhaps the most decisive of all - in the

general evolution of American literature. Important in itself - few names loom larger than those of Twain, Howells or James - it is still more important as a threshold or a point of departure, from which spread out, fanwise, all the main lines of future development. Seemingly chaotic, it introduces a qualitative change which facilitates the crystallisation of a new national culture. As we have already seen¹, it is one of the possible answers to the much-discussed question: Where does American literature really begin?

But the chaos cannot be denied. The United States had become a country of outrageous social contrasts, as Henry George (1839-97) showed in "Progress and Poverty" (1879). The rapidly growing population² was subjected to new, disgustingly brutal forms of exploitation against which there was no protection. The 'Reconstruction' was also the 'Gilded Age', an age of unbridled speculation. The resultant confusion is reflected in literature, which is torn by conflicting, often flatly contradictory tendencies. The new initiatives, so valuable for the future, point in different directions and tend to negate each other.

Moreover the rebirth of literature is at first a hesitant and groping process and the first ten years of the new epoch have little to boast of by way of concrete results. It opens neatly enough in 1865, at the end of the war, with Twain's first successful story³. But Twain was by no means certain of his public and seemed agonisingly slow in following up his initial hit. James enters the arena in 1875 (having settled down more or less

¹ See p.6

² Thirty-one million in 1860, seventy-six million in 1900.

³ "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County".

permanently in Europe seven years earlier), Cable in 1879 and Harris in 1880. Howells printed his first novel in 1872; but the commencement of his role as renovator of American literature (sometimes referred to in a more general sense as the birth of realism) may be conventionally placed at 1885, the year of his masterpiece "The Rise of Silas Lapham", and also of his symbolic move from Boston to New York.

With these provisos, we may now proceed to sum up the distinctive contributions of the time. In most cases we shall be concerned not so much with the achievements of the period itself as with their significance for the future.

I. Most important of the new developments was the rise of Western (often called 'Frontier') literature. This, too, was a general tendency, widely disseminated in both space and time. There is a strong 'frontier' element in Whitman, and a slight one even in Longfellow^I. But it became concentrated in San Francisco immediately after the Civil War, and from there rebounded over the whole territory of the United States. Its exponents were humourists - newspapermen and public lecturers. Most of them used pseudonyms: 'Artemus Ward' (Charles Browne, 1834-1867), Joaquin Miller (1841?-1913), 'Josh Billings' (Henry Shaw, 1818-85), 'Petroleum V. Nasby' (David Locke, 1833-88), *Mark Twain (Samuel Langhorne Clemens, 1835-1910) and many others. They cultivated the tall story and the folklore of the frontier. They expressed themselves in dialect and affected illiteracy. They mercilessly debunked conventional standards of behaviour and the legendary superiority of Eastern (New England) and

^I "Leaves of Grass" and "Hiawatha" were both published in 1855.

European culture. They identified themselves with the masses and - perhaps most important of all - they wrote in the vernacular idiom. Working outside the pale of orthodox 'literature', they laid the foundations of a genuine new, democratic, national tradition which links up directly with the great achievements of the 20th century. Twain, the greatest of them all, went further: passing from farce to the deepest forms of social satire, he became the first atheist author in the United States and the first outstanding writer who saw and exposed American imperialism. It might be added that the Frontier Movement marked a new stage in the development of the short story, as exemplified in the work of Bret Harte (1836-1902) and, somewhat later, Ambrose Bierce (1842-1914?) and 'O. Henry' (William Sydney Porter, 1862-1910).

2. The rise of regionalism in American literature made itself felt already during the preceding period and was the natural consequence of the widely different conditions prevailing in various parts of the country. In a sense regionalism ran counter to the general process of the formation of a new national culture. It had a centrifugal effect which negated the centralising tendency of the mainstream. But it helped to familiarise Americans with their own land; with its emphasis on concrete detail it stimulated the growth of realism (native critics often call it the 'local colour movement'); and it called attention to the value of some of the minority cultures that were already on the verge of extinction.

Two main centres make their appearance about the beginning of the eighties. The first, based on the Negro element in the south, is represented by Joel Chandler Harris (1848-1908), whose popular series of Uncle Remus stories begins in 1879; and by George Washington Cable (1844-1925), who evoked a vivid picture of life in New

Orleans, the old Creole 'capital', in his sketches "Old Creole Days" (1879) and his first novel "The Grandissimes" (1880). Both make free use of dialect; both have a sense of humour, deflating the conventional ideas of bourgeois respectability; both are attracted to folklore and local customs - all qualities which they share in common with the writers of the west.

The other centre is represented by the women writers who describe the homely, somewhat bleak existence of the New England countryside and the northern seaboard. Here belong Beecher-Stowe's later novels and Sarah Orne Jewett's (1849-1909) sketches of Maine ("Deephaven", 1877). Somewhat later they are followed up by Mary Freeman's "A Humble Romance" (1887) and Jewett's finest novel "The Country of the Pointed Firs" (1896). In fact they create a succession which eventually connects them - in spite of the differences in region - with the works of Ellen Glasgow (1874-1945) and Willa Cather (1873-1947). More sober than the southern regionalists, perhaps a little prim, they are saved from the epithet 'genteel' by the briskness of their dialogue and the frank, authentic colouring of their settings.

From this time onwards the regionalist tendency pervades the whole of American literature and is inseparably linked with the growth of realism. To the basic divisions of East (New England), South and West, other regions are soon added, notably the Middle West, with the struggling dirt farms and sweeping cornlands of Wisconsin, Ohio, Illinois (Hamlin Garland, Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, Carl Sandburg). Indeed, the background narrows in the course of time and in spite of the restless mobility of most American writers there are few of them who cannot be 'located'. We should have no difficulty in constructing a map of modern regional

literature, adding to the examples mentioned New Hampshire and Massachusetts (Frost, Robert Lowell), Carolina (Wolfe, Caldwell), California (Steinbeck, Saroyan, Jeffers), Nebraska (Willa Gather), Virginia (Ellem Glasgow), Faulkner's 'Yoknapatawpha county' in Mississippi, etc., etc.

3. Lastly mention must be made of two fundamentally opposed figures, both of whom, each in his own way, exercised a profound and lasting influence on the entire future development of American literature: Howells and James.

*William Dean Howells (1837-1920) may be called the founder of critical realism in the United States. Both through his personal contacts and by the example of his own work he consistently fostered the change of attitude that we usually call the 'transition to realism'. Before the war he had served as a reporter in the Middle West; after it he defended and encouraged Mark Twain (his life-long friend), and the young naturalists Garland, Crane and Norris. The war years themselves he spent in Europe, an experience which enabled him to introduce the great Russian and French writers (Turgenev, Tolstoy, Zola) to the American public. His own novels, however finicky they may seem to the modern reader (long since accustomed to stronger meat), mark a general progress in the direction of realism. If the New England writers were prone to gloss over class differences, Howells stresses them. Towards the end of his long career, as in "A Hazard of New Fortunes" (1890), he is converted to the idea of socialism, from which he never retracts; and he contributed to the spate of utopias which followed the publication of Edward Bellamy's (1850-98) "Looking Backward: 2000-1887" in 1888.

Few of Howells's novels have stood the test of time.

But his importance for the development of American literature can hardly be overestimated. More than any other single writer he typifies the switch-over to realism. The dynamics of his own evolution are projected wholly forwards, into the future. It might well be argued that everything that can be called ideologically progressive in modern American literature stems ultimately from Howells, or is strengthened by his example.

4. *Henry James (1843-1916) made his debut in much the same circumstances as Howells. Their first novels appeared about the same time, and there seemed to be little difference between them. Both of them were exceptions in the sense that they were very much concerned with the problems of women.^I The two men respected each other and maintained a life-long friendship. But their work faced in different directions and they came to symbolise diametrically opposed attitudes and tastes. Both men were deeply influenced by French and Russian literature (James was intimately acquainted with Turgenev, Zola, Daudet, Flaubert and the Goncourts), but they learnt from them different lessons. Perhaps it would be unfair to say that James was more interested in form, Howells in content. Certainly Howells was more concerned with social problems, James with those of the individual.

Of the two, James was without doubt the greater artist. His novels, though to a certain extent an acquired taste, can still be read with interest. Through them he contributed two invaluable new elements, of which American literature was sadly in need: the aspect of conscious

^I As some modern critics have pointed out, the world of the American novel, both before and since, has been essentially a man's world, in which the women characters have played a subordinate role.

artistry, and a far deeper standard of psychological realism. But for these qualities he paid a high price. His own work stands on a high level, but in many ways his influence - as opposed to that of Howells - pointed downwards.¹ He abandoned the American scene (if not the American theme), and became the first of a longish line of expatriates - writers who continued to regard themselves as Americans, but found a more congenial environment for their literary activities in England or France. His example was followed by Henry Adams (1838-1918), Edith Wharton (1862-1937), Gertrude Stein (1874-1946) and others; and it may be debated how much American literature gained or lost as a result.

Secondly, James was a superb stylist - one of the finest in American literature -, but his preoccupation with the effects of language leads to a certain obscurity of content and his later works are sometimes disconcertingly ambiguous. He thus created a precedent for the cult of form which has marred so much of modern American writing. At the same time his subtle psychological analysis prepared the way for the introduction of the Freudian psychoanalytical method and the stream-of-consciousness technique - two innovations of inestimable value when

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James's influence on American literature should not be exaggerated. He stands somewhat aloof from the mainstream of the American novel and belongs rather to European cultural life than to that of the United States.

used as a means to an end, but of more doubtful worth when used as an end in themselves.

II. The Naturalists (1890-1900).

The last decade of the 19th century^I can be conveniently classified under the heading of the naturalist generation, represented by Hamlin Garland (1860-1940), Stephen Crane (1871-1900) and Frank Norris (1870-1902). More than most groups in American literature they were united by their adherence to a conscious programme. Two of them produced works that might fairly be described as naturalist manifestos (Garland's "Crumbling Idols", 1894, and Norris's "The Responsibilities of the Novelist", 1903).

Yet there are curious contradictions which are sometimes difficult to account for. Crane and Norris were deeply influenced by French and Russian literature (Norris signed one of his manuscripts: "The Boy Zola"); but for all three naturalism meant 'nationalism', the study of local conditions, especially in the west. They were all sharply radical in their ideas; but the force of their social criticism is curiously negated by a certain determinism. They take up their stand on the grounds of an uncompromising realism,² but are not always so consistent in practice: (Garland wrote conventional western romances;

^I Garland opens the movement with "Main-Travelled Roads" in 1891; Norris's last works were published posthumously in 1903.

² Here we cannot go into the vexed questions of the definition of realism and its relations with naturalism, with which Soviet criticism has been recently so concerned. Some American theorists appear to use the terms interchangeably.

Crane uses a brilliant impressionist technique; Norris called "The Octopus" "the most romantic thing I've ever done".¹⁾

Whatever their defects, the naturalist writers form an important landmark. They reassert the social function of literature, proclaim their solidarity with the labouring and exploited masses, and strike an effective balance between the twin poles of imagination and objective truth. Henceforth, and throughout the 20th century up to the present moment, naturalism or realism - however we define them - undoubtedly remains the central and most characteristic current of the American novel.

One further point should be made. The naturalists entered literature through journalism, and this determined to a large extent both their methods and their choice of subject-matter. The approach was not a new one. It had been used by Twain and Howells, and even by Poe and Irving. But journalism had itself changed since then. Moreover the exception now became the rule. Dreiser, Crane, Norris, Lenden, Herrick, Sinclair, Anderson, Hemingway, Lewis - the list could be prolonged indefinitely, for there is hardly a single outstanding modern novelist whose work has not grown out of his apprenticeship as a newspaperman.

As realism advanced, the romantic tradition declined, producing, before it finally degenerated into the cheap hack-writing of the 20th century, the popular 'medieval' novels of Francis Marion Crawford (1854-1909). But literature is seldom so easy to label as we could wish it to be and, to do him justice, we should perhaps add that Crawford (although himself essentially an expatriate) also wrote a

¹ There is a similar vein of powerful romanticism in Zola.

few shrewdly critical stories about the modern American scene.

III. The literature of the class struggle (1900-1918)

To no other epoch in the history of American literature (with the possible exception of the nineteen-thirties) can this epithet be applied so aptly as to the years leading up to the First World War. Romanticism is now definitely 'out'; and the aristocratic medieval fantasies of James Branch Cabell (1879-1958), though more refined and thought-provoking than Crawford's, seem wilfully aloof and out of touch with the times.

The rise of realism and naturalism had coincided with the emergence of a new and decisive stage in the social conflict. The 'Haymarket massacre'¹ of 1886 had not only shocked public opinion throughout the world; its repercussions on literature were comparable to those of the Sacco and Vanzetti case in the nineteen-twenties. The American Federation of Labour, founded in 1881, now sprang into activity and laid the foundations of a mass trade-union movement. The conception of American naturalism was inseparably bound up with the ideas of the Populist movement.² Now, at the turn of the century, the revolutionary left wing of the working-class is led by the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World), who with their traditional songs (the so-called 'wobbly' songs), aphorisms, anecdotes and legends mark the birth of a genuinely independent,

¹ This execution of five Chicago anarchists on a trumped-up charge of terrorism was characterised by Howells as "an atrocious piece of frenzy and cruelty for which we must stand ashamed forever before history".

² The Populist Party was founded in 1891, a date which coincides exactly with the publication of Garland's first book.

class-conscious, proletarian culture in the United States. Their leader, who became a central figure in progressive American literature, was Joe Hill (Joseph Hillstrom, 1879-1915), the "man who never died".

In fiction the new century is ushered in by *Jack London (1878-1916),¹ whose work is as unequal as his ideas are contradictory and confused. Nowadays we remember him mainly as the writer who introduced into American literature the tragic, primeval background of the Frozen North.² Hut in addition to his central theme of individual physical endurance he is haunted by the idea of social revolution. In this sense he goes a step farther than Howells and the naturalists. If there is any single idea which permeates his life (as opposed to his fiction) and to which he persistently returns in his articles, speeches, letters, essays, it is that of the armed uprising of the masses as the only means of overthrowing the existing order and building the just, free society of the future.

Other interesting personalities are the talented radical essayist Randolph Bourne (1886-1918) and the colourful revolutionary propagandist Lincoln Steffens (1866-1936), whose more substantial contributions are linked with the 'muckraking' movement.

The 'muckrakers' themselves dominate the period as a period rarely dominated by a single current. They stand halfway between the growing spate of controversial writing and what can be more fairly called 'literature'; or rather

¹ London's first collection of stories, "The Son of the Wolf", was published in 1900.

² Another cycle of tales is set in the South Sea islands, but London's treatment of this exotic setting, vivid though it undoubtedly is, was anticipated by Melville.

they effect a steady transition in which the following stages can be distinguished: a stage of militant journalism, fiercely attacking the corruption of the ward-heeler and monopoly capitalist; a stage of serious sociological research¹; and lastly the study of social problems through the medium of fiction, as in the 23 novels of David Graham Phillips (1867-1911) and the 12 novels of Robert Herrick (1868-1938). Undoubtedly the supreme achievement of the 'muckraking' movement in literature was "The Jungle" (1906) by *Upton Sinclair (1878-1968), a ruthless exposure of the scandalous conditions in the meat-packing industry. No other work has exercised such a tremendous impact on American social life. For the next fifty years Sinclair kept up a steady stream of fiery radical novels, although his ideas changed towards the end. Throughout the twenties and thirties he retained his position as the most popular American novelist in the Soviet Union.

It was not by chance that "The Jungle" was set in Chicago. After a meteoric growth, fantastic even in American conditions,² Chicago was rapidly emerging at the beginning of the century as a potent new focus of national culture, the "literary capital of the United States", as it was soon to be called by H.L. Mencken (1880-1956), the spokesman of a new, less conventional conception of literature. Shortly afterwards it was destined to become

¹ Mention should be made of Ida Tarbell's "History of the Standard Oil Company" (1904), and two works by Gustavus Myers: "The History of Tammany Hall" (1901-17) and "The History of the Great American Fortunes" (1910).

² The population of Chicago had grown from 350 inhabitants in 1835 to 500,000 in 1880, and over a million in 1890. It provided the setting for Norris's "The Pit", London's "The Iron Heel", Herrick's novels and the poems of William Vaughn Moody (1869-1910).

the centre of the spectacular revival of American poetry, led by Sandburg and others.

Meanwhile Chicago had also fostered the imposing, though much debated, output of Theodore Dreiser (1871-1945), most of whose novels are contained within the present period.^I True, the hostility of both public and publishers prevented him from rising to fame till the twenties. It was then, too, that he published his masterpiece "An American Tragedy" (1925), which has been acclaimed by Soviet critics as a transition to the principles of socialist realism. Yet Dreiser is essentially a naturalist and his characters are the helpless products of their sordid environment. For all that, his novels amount to a crushing indictment of American capitalist society, devastating by reason of their unflinching honesty.

Most American writers were now socialists. Jack London, in the "Iron Heel" had foretold that the revolution would take place in the United States in 1932; Upton Sinclair set the deadline at 1913. In November 1914, Sinclair Lewis published an essay with the significant title "The relation of the novel to the present social unrest: the passing of capitalism". The news of the October Revolution of 1917 was greeted with enthusiasm. Three men were directly involved in the revolutionary maelstrom. Lincoln Steffens visited Soviet Russia in 1918 and 1923, returning to deliver the famous aphorism: "I have seen the future, and it works!" Albert Rhys Williams

^I Dreiser's first novel, "Sister Carrie", was printed in 1900, but suppressed by the publisher on account of its frank treatment of sexual relationships. It was not finally released to the American public till years later.

(1883-1962) stayed there for over a year in 1917-18,¹ gathering the materials for "Through the Russian Revolution" (1924) and "Lenin, the Man and His Work" (1925). After reporting the great strikes of 1913 and 1914, and the wars in Mexico and in Eastern Europe, John Reed (1887-1920) produced the most dramatic document in American literature of the revolution to which he sacrificed his life.²

¹ Later Williams lived about ten years in the Soviet Union.

² "Ten Days That Shook the World", 1919. This was the work of which Lenin said: "I should like to see this book distributed in millions of copies and translated into all languages" (preface to the American edition).

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The United States emerged from the war as the most powerful imperialist country in the world. Between 1912 and 1922 the national wealth had doubled, for the devastation of Europe had brought fabulous profits to American capitalism. The export of capital naturally stimulated the export of culture. American habits and tastes - good and bad - received international currency. Jazz, Negro songs, pettishers, the Hollywood film - all became part and parcel of European social life. Their negative aspects need not be laboured here. Taken altogether, they brought with them a spirit of youthful irresponsibility and homely informality which could not fail to appeal to the stunned, war-weary, mentally bankrupt nations of the Old World. Moreover, the Americans themselves had lost their inferiority complex. They spoke - and wrote - in their own language; and they had something to say. Now, for the first time, American literature assumed a leading role. It caught up with the experiments of the European avant-garde in a single stride. In poetry and the drama - things which had hardly seemed to exist in the United States - it was blazing trails for others to follow. Soon the names of Hemingway, Lewis, Faulkner, became names to conjure with all over the world. Thus the twentieth century, especially the twenties and thirties, was, on the whole, a golden age for American literature, unequalled for its richness and vitality, for the variety and beldness of its achievements. At its best, it propagated significant new standards of honesty, realism and moral responsibility.

The classification of this vast mass of original material is a task of great difficulty. The very process

of selection raises a multitude of problems which cannot be satisfactorily disposed of until the passage of time allows the judgements of both critics and public to fall into some sort of perspective. Much that new seems significant may pass into oblivion; other names, new unnoticed, may rise into prominence. In such circumstances we can only keep track of the general tendencies, at the risk of forming hasty judgements in individual cases.

Then there is the question of the sheer volume of modern American fiction. Confronted with an output which has been estimated at over four hundred new novels a year, the reader - and the critic - cannot hope to arrive at a balanced opinion. Nor is it likely that the research student of the future will be any better off. True, many of these books are second-rate; but it is not always easy to distinguish between good and bad novels, even when we have read them ourselves. There are good bad books, and bad good books. True, these problems hardly affect the average student, who is concerned only with the 'known' authors and 'outstanding' works. Nevertheless they have their bearing on the subject and must be borne in mind.

Moreover, any attempt at classification is, as we have already seen, vitiated from the outset. With the possible exception of the 'Agrarians' in the south and the writers of the 'Beat' there is no real group in modern American literature which can be said to be united by a common programme or a common attitude and a feeling of 'belonging'. On the contrary, most writers try to be 'different' and sedulously cultivate their own individuality. There are common tendencies, but these are often strangely mixed. How should we classify such a novelist as Des Passos, for example? His experiences in an unbalanced unit in France and the bitter 'secessionist' mood of his early novels place him squarely with the 'Lost Generation'.

Later he moves closer to the working-class movement, though he never becomes a proletarian writer.¹ His recent works reveal an almost complete abandonment of his former critical spirit. In technique he has much in common with Sinclair Lewis (both writers may be regarded as representatives of the 'documentary novel'), though in all other respects the two writers are poles apart.

Such difficulties bring home to us the fact that any classification on the basis of style or content should be treated as little more than a rough working agreement adopted for convenience' sake. Fortunately the question of periodisation is less open to doubt. With the exception of the Second World War and its subsequent reflection in literature, the whole period falls naturally into decades according to the factors (economic developments, social trends, political events, international affairs) by which the subject-matter and methods of literature are determined. These subdivisions are nowhere explicitly stated, but they seem to be taken for granted. The beginning of the economic crisis in 1929 and of the Second World War are obvious dividing lines. Another natural boundary can be fixed at the end of the fifties, when there is an abrupt intensification of the class struggle accompanied by a significant regrouping of the progressive forces in the country. This leaves us with the following simple pattern composed of five main divisions: I the twenties (1919-29); II the thirties (1929-39); III the Second World War and its repercussions on American literature; IV the post-war period (1945-59); V recent American literature (from 1960 onwards).

¹ His great trilogy "U.S.A." has been defined as a classic example of the 'collectivist novel'.

I The 'Jazz Age' and the 'Lost Generation' (1919-29).

The economic boom and the retreat from the political struggle. As we have seen, 1919 marked the beginning of a great age for American literature. But this greatness was not achieved without a sacrifice. During the previous period American literature had become one of the most militant and revolutionary literatures in the world. Now this quality was lost. There was a loss of social awareness, a general retreat from the idea of class struggle. Literature turned from the problems of society to the problems of the individual. In some ways it became more realistic, since it no longer attempted to anticipate the future. There were no more appeals, predictions, utopias. Instead, we have a painful reevaluation of the present after the catastrophe of the war.

This catastrophe was for the United States more of a moral or intellectual order than of a material one. America had not only escaped the frightful destruction of the war, she had become rich. The new decade brought with it an economic boom that was unprecedented in the stormy history of American capitalism, and not even the scandals of the Harding and Coolidge administrations could impair the general feeling of prosperity. The new plutocracy introduced new standards of social behaviour which threw into relief the negative aspects of the 'American way of life'. This was the 'Jazz Age'; and it was faithfully recorded by Fitzgerald.

The retreat from the political struggle was not confined to literature alone. The AFL had become - as Jack London had predicted - a labour aristocracy pursuing a policy of class compromise. The working class itself was subjected to unbridled terrorism. The leaders of the IWW and the Socialist Party were thrown into jail. Negro

lynching was rife; and the masses were intimidated by the forces of reaction. The only large-scale action which united the vast majority of writers in the twenties and was widely echoed in literature was the effort to save the lives of Sacco and Vanzetti; but this took the form of an international humanitarian campaign rather than a political issue, and was moreover unsuccessful. 'Secession', then, meant not only a rejection of conventional patriotism; it also implied disaffiliation from the labour movement and the ideal of socialism. Sinclair Lewis is a case in point. At first a convinced socialist (as a student he was nicknamed 'Lewis the Red'), he greeted the October Revolution and visited Tom Meany in prison. He planned to write a long documentary novel on the working-class struggle modelled on the life of Eugene Debs, the popular socialist leader. But he never finished it; and when he finally made his name with his long series of exposures of the 'American way of life', discussed from every conceivable angle, it might be noticed that he did less than justice to the political conflict.

The literary background; the commercialisation of literature. Cheap fiction had existed in the United States ever since the Revolutionary Period. The very first novelists were women whose sentimental and moralising effusions can hardly be treated seriously as literature. But the tradition they set died hard, and as late as 1855 Hawthorne complained that the country was "new wholly given over to a d-d mob of scribbling women".^I Afterwards tastes began to change, but the growing market for hack-writing produced the notorious 'dime novel' of

^I Typical examples of this kind of writing were Susan Warner's popular romances "The Wide, Wide World" (1851) and "Queechy" (1852).

the Frontier movement, which exercised such a pernicious influence on Jack London. After the war the flood of cheap fiction inundated the market and set the serious author at a grave disadvantage. From now on entire new 'genres' can be distinguished, including the western, the novelette or sentimental romance, the detective story with its later subspecies the 'whodunit', and many other types of varying 'specific gravity', up to the 'sofic' of the present day.

Another significant development was the advent of the 'bestseller', of which two of the most spectacular examples were "Anthony Adverse" by Hervey Allen (1889-1949), of which 250,000 copies were sold in 1933, and Margaret Mitchell's (1900-1949) "Gone with the Wind", which sold a million and a half, 1936-7. Not all best-sellers were badly written; far from it.^I But the very situation in which one book might be sold in far larger numbers than the total output of all the other authors put together was essentially an unhealthy one. It induced writers to abandon their principles in favour of fashions that were artificially imposed from without; and from time to time the author (Lewis, Steinbeck, Faulkner) deliberately lowered his standards in an attempt to come to terms with the public and the publishers.

Psycheanalysis and primitivism in the American novel.

One of the most significant new elements introduced by the 20th century was the application to literature of the Freudian conception of the subconscious. Accepted throughout the world, it exercised a particularly far-reaching influence on American culture. In many ways its effect on literature (where it was often exaggerated and

^I The list of bestsellers includes such major works as "Mainstreet", "Babbitt" and "An American Tragedy".

distorted) were more powerful and radical than its impact on science. A further development was the stream-of-consciousness technique, which had always been present in a rudimentary form but was now converted into an exclusive method, sufficient in itself, by Joyce and Virginia Woolf. Associated with both was the new frankness in dealing with questions of sex, also partly derived from Freud and the Viennese school of psychology. As we have seen, these were real and invaluable gains when they were employed as a means to an end, and they certainly did much to extend the limits of realism.¹

But unfortunately they were soon carried to extremes. Plunging into the subconscious, many writers lost track of the real problems of society and the living human relations through which they were expressed. The emphasis was transferred to psychopathology, giving rise to a morbid cult of the abnormal. Sex, so long repressed, now became the central interest of literature, as of the film. Indeed, it is still the sine qua non of the American novel and 'sex for the sake of sex' might be called the slogan of the present, just as 'art for art's sake' was that of an earlier generation. As a result of the psychoanalytical novel, as exemplified in the works of Thornton Wilder (b. 1897), for example, or Henry Miller (b. 1891) degenerates into what must be objectively classified as a negation of realism.

One reaction to the ultra-refined psychoanalytical novel might be seen in the tendency, common to European literature in the twenties,² to reduce human reactions to the

¹ This exasperating habit has been adopted as a legitimate device by several novelists (notably Faulkner) and seems, moreover, to have received the sanction of the American critics, who have not always been able to distinguish between deliberate obscurity - so easy to achieve - and genuine profundity.

² A typical example from Estonian literature is Jakobson's "Vaeste patuste alev" (1927).

level of primitive instinct, to concentrate on man's physiological, animal appetites while ignoring his intellectual powers. The resulting characters are dumb and inarticulate, like those of the old silent films. At their worst, as in some of Erskine Caldwell's stories, they become repulsively brutish. Many of Faulkner's characters are mentally deficient and large sections of his novels are not only "full of sound and fury", but also, to the reader's grave inconvenience and dismay, literally "told by an idiot".

Nevertheless the finest achievements of the period bear witness to a splendid reaffirmation and enrichment of the conception of realism.

Having indicated some of the basic new qualities, we may now proceed to distinguish the following 'groups' and currents in the literature of the twenties:

1. The psychoanalytical novel (mentioned above),

2. The 'genteel tradition'¹ is a limited, 'respectable' type of petty-bourgeois realism and its best achievements are readable without rising to the rank of great literature. A characteristic figure is Joseph Hergesheimer (1880-1954); but he is only one of many.² As a general rule, these writers avoid violent situations, dislike politics and take notice of only the mildest social issues. Somewhat of an exception in all these three respects is Booth Tarkington (1869-1946), whose novel "The Plutocrat" (1927) amounts to a tacit apology of the capitalist system.

3. The naturalist mainstream of modern American

¹ This term roughly corresponds to the Russian "нежный реализм".

² The European reader will be able to construct a fairly complete list on the basis of the Tauchnitz collection of British and American authors.

literature remains strongly regionalist in character. Sherwood Anderson (1876-1941) describes the frustrated, uneventful lives of the small farmers and tradesmen of the Middle West (Ohio). *Erskine Caldwell (b.1903) became famous for his brutally realistic studies of the rural proletariat (Negroes and poor whites) in the south (Carolina).

4. *Sinclair Lewis (1885-1951) is, at his best and most typical, a solitary, forbidding figure,¹ but he may be classified here as the chief exponent of an important new development, which we provisionally call the method of documentary realism. With this instrument, or rather weapon, he creates what is essentially an entirely new type of novel in which the fictional element is reduced to a minimum. In fact the 'story' is nothing, a mere peg; the background is everything. Authenticity is achieved by accumulating a multitude of details, grimly chosen from the drab, uninspiring round known as 'everyday life'. No concessions are made to the reader's prejudices or susceptibilities. All is grist for the author's mill: slogans, speeches, anecdotes, newspaper cuttings, banal phrases, advertisements, popular songs, proverbs, slang - an endless list of the characteristic vulgarities that form the very fabric of the 'American way of life'. A similar technique, though with a stronger political bias, is used in the 'Newsreel'

¹ As a novelist and thinker Lewis is painfully unstable and self-contradictory, and his vacillations are largely due to his self-imposed isolation. As he himself stated in his Nobel address (printed in a miscellany of 1931 under the title of "The American Fear of Literature"), one of the tragic disabilities of the American novelist is his estrangement from the public.

sections of Dees Passee' "U.S.A." trilogy.

5. The so-called 'Lest Generation' deminate the twenties but dees net amount to an organised group of writers. This phrase can be understeed in different ways. As first used by Gertrude Stein, it was a term of reproach levelled against all the young men who had taken part in the war and as a result no longer respected anything. In this sense it would apply to John Dees Passee (1896-1970), B. B. Cumminge and *Ernest Miller Hemingway (1899-1961), ell of whom served at the frent in ambulance unite; and perhaps also to *Francis Scett Key Fitzgerald (1896-1940) and Faulkner, both of whom were trained in military camps, though they did net take part in the actual fighting. Secendly, it has been taken to mean the group of young writers who lived in Paris after the war and were patronised (perhaps 'matrenised' would be a better word) by Gertrude Steir; in which case we should have to add the name of Ezra Pound. Thirdly, it has been applied to the post-war generation of American and British writers who were sickened by the heolecaust of 1914-18 and rejected the false slogan of Wileenian rhetoric and the hypocritical morals of bourgeois society with its fraudulent appeals to 'patrietism' and 'demecracy' in the name of which it had been committed. This is the sense in which the term is generally used nowadays, enabling us to include Sherweed Andersen, H. Wolfe, the British novelist Richard Aldington, and many more. Now that its initial tone of admonition (which so offended Hemingway) has been long forgotten, it remains a useful and effective label, designating a characteristic literary attitude; and it is particularly

appropriate when applied to the first crop of war novels (surely it would be more accurate to say 'anti-war novels') written by Anderson ("Marching Men", 1917), Des Passes ("One Man's Initiation: 1917", 1920; "Three Soldiers", 1921), Faulkner ("Soldier's Pay", 1926) and Hemingway ("The Sun Also Rises", 1926; "A Farewell to Arms", 1929).

6. The advent of William Faulkner (1897-1962) heralds the revival of southern literature as an independent tradition, though he was not to achieve general recognition till the thirties and the southerners do not emerge as a well-defined group till the fifties.

7., 8. The spectacular revival of American poetry and the drama begins in the previous period, but is first fully felt in the twenties (see concluding sections).

9. The post-war decade also marks the beginning of Marxist proletarian literature in the United States.¹ This was closely connected with the formation of the Communist Party in 1921,² but had become a vigorous and clear-cut

¹ Often locally referred to by Soviet critics under the designation of 'progressive literature' (an unfortunate habit - since it implies that non-Marxist works cannot be progressive - and a source of considerable confusion).

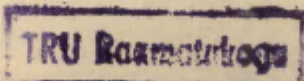
² After the split in the Socialist Party in 1919, two separate illegal organisations came into existence, the Communist Party and the Communist Workers Party. Negotiations were opened between them in 1920, and in December 1921, together with a number of other Marxist groups, they amalgamated to form the Workers Party, which later became known as the CPUSA.

ideological tendency still earlier. The membership of the Party was small, but it exercised an important influence on cultural life through its organs and personal contacts. Among the revolutionary and Marxist publications which have left their mark on American literature mention may be made of "The Masses" (1911-18), "The Liberator" (1919-24), "New Masses" (1926-48), "Masses and Mainstream" (1948-57) and "American Dialog" (from 1964). The founder of American working-class literature was Michael Gold (Irwin Granich, 1894-1967), who produced a steady stream of articles, reviews, poems and plays, and whose "Jews without Money" (1930) was the first of a fine succession of proletarian novels unequalled by any other capitalist country in the world.

II The 'Depression Decade' (1929-39)^I

The collapse of the New York stock market in 1929 put an end to the boom and marked the beginning of an economic crisis that gripped the whole of the capitalist world. In the United States unemployment rose to seventeen millions in 1932, the year of the first great hunger march. A period of fierce class struggle ensued. The strikes of 1933-4 involved over three million workers. The working class itself became more class conscious; by 1939 union membership had risen to eight and a half million (23% of the employed population, as opposed to 18% in 1932). To a certain extent the activation of the labour movement was stimulated by the liberal reforms of F.D. Roosevelt's 'New Deal', launched in 1933.

^I Other expressions frequently met with are 'the red decade', 'the revolutionary decade', 'the stormy thirties', etc.



An important role was played by the example of the Soviet Union. Dreiser, who had visited the USSR in 1927, sketched a convincing picture of the fundamental differences between socialism and capitalism in his contrasted studies "Dreiser looks at Russia" (1928) and "Tragic America" (1931) and included a memorable portrait of a girl revolutionary (Ermita) in his "Gallery of Women" (1929). The 'progressive hero' now becomes a familiar figure in the American novel. Many authors outside the proletarian group are still reluctant to mention specific working-class organisations, but there is a growing tendency to acknowledge the existence of the Communist Party and quite a number of the new revolutionary heroes are described as communists. Sinclair Lewis, who is so anxious to disdain the least suggestion of political affiliation, makes an ungrudging tribute to the moral calibre of the average party member in his portrait of Jessie Van Tuyl ('Ann Vickers', 1933).

A still more powerful influence on American literature was exercised by the struggle against fascism, which gathered weight with each new step of fascist aggression: the Far East in 1931, Germany in 1933, Abyssinia in 1935, Spain in 1936. While some American writers still hesitated to identify themselves with the class struggle, all were unanimous in their condemnation of fascism. Besides, Lewis showed that the fight for peace and democracy was indivisible, and that, contrary to general belief, there was a very real danger of fascism in the United States itself.^I The crucial event was the civil war in Spain. Meetings and demonstrations were held all over the country to protest against the government policy of 'non-intervention' which in practice led the scales in favour of the aggressor. American volunteers including Alvah Bessie and Edwin Reife,

^I "It Can't Happen Here" (1935).

fought in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. Dorothy Parker served as a front-line reporter. The vast majority of American writers emphatically proclaimed their support of the Republican government. Upton Sinclair contributed a novel: 'No Pasaran' (1937). Hemingway made two trips to Spain as a war correspondent in 1936 and 1937, and spent several months at the front and in Madrid, recording his experiences in a number of stories, his impressive novel 'For Whom the Bell Tolls' (1940) and his only play 'The Fifth Column' (1938). He also wrote the script for the film 'Spanish Earth' (1938) and in 1939 he contributed a moving memorial article to 'New Masses' in honour of the American anti-fascists who had fallen in Spain.

With the general upsurge of political activity socialism now seemed once again a real objective and the heritage of the early revolutionaries was revived. The John Reed Club, founded in New York at the end of 1929, possessed 30 branches in various parts of the country in 1932. Its representatives attended the conference of the Revolutionary Writers' Union at Kharkev in 1930, and it held national conferences of its own in 1932 and 1934. Its magazines, which included 'Partisan Review' (New York), 'Leftward' (Boston), 'Left Review' (Philadelphia), 'Left Front' (Chicago) and 'Partisan' (Hollywood, Carmel and San Francisco), did much to further Marxist literary criticism and propagate revolutionary poetry.

The first American Writers Congress, held at New York in 1935, was attended by 216 delegates and 150 guests. Thirty reports were delivered, including speeches by Des Paines, Langston Hughes, Conroy, Farrell, Malcolm Cowley and others; and the League of American Writers - the first organisation of its kind in the history of American literature - was founded. The Second Congress, held in 1937, was mainly devoted to the struggle in Spain; MacLeish spoke on

"Spain and American Writers" and Hemingway read his first public address: "The Writer and War". The Third Congress, which was more concerned with problems of literary theory, took place in June, 1939; the Fourth, and last, in June, 1941, a few months before the treacherous attack on Pearl Harbour and the entry of the United States into the war. The League of American Writers disbanded itself in the autumn of 1942. One result of all these activities was that the writers of the thirties were more united than at any other time in the history of American literature. Another was that literature now became an active social force, directly involved in the political struggle and reacting swiftly to the immediate needs of the moment. Alert and responsive to the temper of the masses, it played a leading role in mobilising them in defence of democracy.

This is not to say that all the outstanding writers became Marxists overnight. They did not. Soreyan and Steinbeck seemed, for a time, to be actually sidetracking the new orientation. Faulkner appeared to be more involved in the problems of the long-forgotten American civil war and its aftermath than those of the Spanish civil war. Lewis and Hemingway were strikingly unequal. The latter, in particular, seemed to be groping his way with harrowing self-interrogation, and when he finally produced his great novel on the Spanish war it was denounced by Eberhard Bruening as a "tragic failure" which "objectively served the cause of the enemies of the Spanish people".^I Nevertheless, in spite of the vacillations of the leaders, there was a general swing to the left, particularly noticeable in the

^I Similar viewpoints were expressed by Michael Geld and Alvah Bessie. Though, perhaps, understandable at the time, they seem harshly doctrinaire and unjust in retrospect.

drama, and the broad current of American literature began to take on a more progressive and democratic character, producing, for example, in a confused writer like Steinbeck so splendidly realistic and militant a novel as "Grapes of Wrath" (1939).

The literary background of the nineteen-thirties can be dealt with more summarily, as most of the outstanding writers have already been 'placed' in the previous decade. All of them go on with their work in the thirties, together with one or two writers, such as Dreiser and Upton Sinclair, who fundamentally belong to the first ante-bellum. In such cases there is a 'difference of generation', but this is due to changes in the environment, not in the author's conception of literature, and it does not involve, as a rule, any radical break in his manner, or even in his ideas. There are no abrupt ideological twists such as we meet in the fifties. Here and there we are faced with inner contradictions of various kinds, and sometimes (as, for instance, in Sinclair Lewis) we are left with the disconcerting impression of a complete volte-face. But these shifts of attitude usually level themselves out and, if we take into account all the writer's veiled inconsistencies and limitations, they seldom affect the general pattern of his work. On the contrary, these writers whose work extends over two, or even three, generations (Sinclair, De Sade, Hemingway, Lewis, Faulkner, etc.) seem surprisingly consistent. After all their minor changes in attitude their literary personality seems all the more distinct. Indeed, this emergence of a unique, unmistakable, individuality is the hall-mark of any author worth his salt.

Consequently there is no need for a regrouping of the whole literary scene. The old divisions remain, and all that we have to do is to add the new names and tendencies. From this point of view we may conveniently summarise the

peried under the following heads:

I. Local colour and the new regionalism.

*John Steinbeck (1902-68) and William Sareyan (b. 1908) both came from California and both have been particularly interested in the distinctive features of their home country. In this sense they are both regionalists.¹ But their regionalism is of a rather limited and artificial type, especially in their early works. More than a realistic device it is a decorative element. It points away from the important social issues of the time. Moreover it has a certain exotic, 'alien' quality. Steinbeck's heroes were the 'paisanos' (farmhands, fishers and loafers of Spanish and Portuguese descent) of the Salinas valley and Menterrey; Sareyan's were members of the Armenian colony in the nearby Fresno district. Both writers are imbued with a spirit of picaresque adventure. Yet in both cases this interest in a minority culture also has a critical function: it is an implicit rejection of the conventional Anglo-Saxon mentality which symbolises American bourgeois culture. Later the two men followed different paths. Sareyan's early warmth and bitterness fade into a sort of facile western-type humour marred by occasional lapses into sentimental philistinism; Steinbeck fluctuates between straightforward realism and a sort of

¹ Farrell and Wolfe might also be dubbed regionalists, since Farrell's novels are almost exclusively confined to Chicago, and Wolfe's "Catawba", which forms the starting-point of most of his work, is obviously North Carolina, where he was born and bred. But there is a significant difference: they do not cultivate the background for its own sake, as is so often the case with Steinbeck and Sareyan.

mystic symbolism so abruptly that he must be regarded as one of the most unpredictable writers in modern American literature.

2. The social novel: Farrell and Wolfe. The mainstream of realism, or naturalism, in the thirties is reinforced by the addition of two new novelists of exceptional power: James Farrell (b. 1904) and *Thomas Clayton Wolfe (1900-36). But their approach is different: the impact of Farrell's work (especially the "Studs Lonigan" series, in which he describes the lives of the Irish hoodlums in the Chicago slums) is derived from the brutality of his setting; Wolfe's amorphous, titanic novels are charged with the force of passionate self-revelation. Wolfe, like Hemingway, indignantly disassociated himself from the label of the 'Lest' generation. But in all other respects he is the antithesis of the elder writer and his tumultuous outbursts of emotion form such a complete contrast to Hemingway's carefully pruned understatement that it is difficult to believe that the two men worked in the same country at the same time. Both Farrell and Wolfe reflect the growing political consciousness of the decade: Farrell at one time openly professed his solidarity with the labour movement (though he later disavowed his Marxist ideas); Wolfe's masterpiece "You Can't Go Home Again" (1940) contains sharply critical pictures of Nazi Germany and of the New York intelligentsia during the depression. Both writers shocked the reading public. But whereas Wolfe is classed as a critical realist by Soviet critics, Farrell is a rare example of the pure naturalist. His treatment of the role of the environment is reminiscent of his masters Dreiser and Zola, and one of his novels¹ was taken to court on a charge of obscenity.

¹ "A World I Never Made" (1936).

3., 4. Poetry adds a few new names and a few great poems to the brilliant achievements of the twenties. But it is in the drama - even more than in the novel - that the revolutionary mood of the 'red decade' is most vividly expressed. (See concluding sections).

5. The central figure of proletarian literature is now *Albert Maltz (b. 1908), whose short stories, novels, plays, essays and articles are consistently devoted to the cause of the working-class movement and the struggle against fascism. To his name should be added those of Jack Conroy (b. 1899) and William Hellins (b. 1897). The latter's gripping account of a textile strike "The Shadow Before" (1934) deserves mention as one of the finest revolutionary novels in American literature.

Many new names are connected with the activities of the working-class theatre (Irwin Shaw, John Howard Lawson, Paul Peters, George Sklar). Alvah Cecil Bessie (b. 1904), already mentioned in connection with the Spanish war, wrote articles, news items, short stories, film scripts and a few novels. Edwin Relfe (1905-54), another veteran of the Lincoln Brigade, and Dorothy Parker (b. 1893) are remembered mainly for their revolutionary poetry. Philip Stevenson (1896-1965), perhaps better known by his pseudonym Lars Lawrence, produced a long series of stories, plays and novels stretching from 1927 to 1963 and revealing him as one of the most consistent representatives of American proletarian literature.

III The Second World War in American literature

From the point of view of American literature the Second World War must be regarded rather as an event than as a 'period' with well-defined chronological limits. Yet it certainly constitutes a new stage of development. Many

of the old social problems (especially questions of the labour movement and the internal economic development of the United States) were tacitly shelved; others (especially the struggle against fascism) acquired a more urgent significance.

But the beginning and end of this new stage cannot be fixed with certainty. "Coming events cast their shadow before", and in many ways the war period is a natural extension of the preceding period. In 1939 both the Soviet Union and the United States were neutral countries and it was not until 1941 that they were finally drawn into the maelstrom. The end is still harder to fix. Most of the books written about the war itself were published after an appreciable time-lag, in some cases more than twenty years after the cease-fire. The immediate post-bellum was a confused and contradictory time in which the old habits of thought continued to struggle for existence and the new attitudes had not yet crystallised.

I. General tendencies. Some obvious generalisations may be made. The war, especially after the entry of the United States in 1941, exerted a two-fold influence on American literature. Time was short and the larger genres of the previous period now drop out of the picture. Neither the author nor the reader had the leisure to cultivate the outside novel or the long narrative poem. The theatre-going public was drastically reduced and plays were at a discount. On the other hand there was a great demand for all kinds of informative and descriptive literature - a demand that continued to grow during the post-war years. Vivid, effective reporting of the type practised by the progressive writers of the thirties (Dreiser, Sinclair, Malraux) took its place as a recognised type of

literature.¹ The essay and the short poem rose to the fore. On the whole, as was only to be expected, the total volume of literary production sharply fell.

But there were compensatory features. The very existence of a common struggle against fascism helped to draw the United States and the Soviet Union together. Erskine Caldwell arrived in Moscow from the Far East in 1941 and wrote a number of graphic war-time sketches and narratives, as well as a novel about the guerilla warfare in Nazi-occupied territory. Everywhere there was a growth in social and political awareness and the progressive element in American literature was reinforced. After a series of vacillations and retractions Sinclair Lewis - to quote only one example - vigorously reasserted his critical attitude to bourgeois society in 'Hallelujah' (1943) and 'Kingsblood Royal' (1947). A significant (if not exactly typical) gesture was Dreiser's decision to join the Communist Party in 1945, a few months before his death, and the well-known public statement which he made on this occasion might be taken as the expression of the mood of a whole generation.

2. Progressive writers of the war period and after.

In these conditions the proletarian writers gain enormously in prestige and what might be defined as the current of socialist realism became for a brief space of time the dominant tendency in American literature. Four new names should now be added to the imposing (though by no means exhaustive) list given under this head in the previous period. Howard Fast (b. 1914) occupies first place with

¹ This kind of writing is called 'reportaaž' in Estonian; unfortunately there is no widely accepted English equivalent.

his brilliant series of historical novels, though it must be admitted that his studies of the contemporary scene are - perhaps significantly enough - far less convincing. Hardly less important is the full-blooded, original figure of Richard Wright (1908-1960), who must be regarded as the most powerful Negro novelist in American literature. Alexander Saxton (b. 1918) evokes an authentic picture of working-class conditions in his novels about the Chicago railwayman and the decker of the west coast; and Mitchell Wilson (b. 1913) has achieved wide-spread popularity in the Soviet Union with his masterly treatment of the impact of nuclear physics on the modern world.

3. The war novel. Most of the American war novels were naturally completed and published long after the cessation of hostilities (stories of the Second World War were still appearing in the sixties); but, however dispersed in time, they form a problem in themselves and it is convenient to treat them en bloc. The general tone is bitter and tragic. Who was responsible for the catastrophe? Could it have been avoided? There was no choice - fascism had to be destroyed. But few American writers had any deep-seated illusions about bourgeois democracy, which was itself not free from blame. It was a case of defending "the bad against the worse"; and war itself, however inevitable it might be, was frightfully inhuman and irrational. As a result the American war novel was in no need for patriotic flag-waving. It was sceptical, self-critical and pacifist in its approach. Its attitude to the American war machine was undisguisedly hostile. Stefan Heym's^I 'The Crusaders' (1948) is, in

^I Heym (b. 1913) was a German who had emigrated to the U.S. in 1933 and took part in the invasion of Normandy as a soldier in the American Army, returning to (East) Germany

effect, a critique of bourgeois society and bourgeois ideology in what may be called the tradition of socialist realism, exposing the underlying economic interests, the speculation, the hidden hand of the big monopolies, the compromise with German capitalism. Irwin Shaw (b. 1913) in 'The Young Lions' (1948) produced a moving study of the struggle to preserve the spirit of human solidarity in the dehumanised environment of the front. The two most powerful American war novels were unquestionably 'The Naked and the Dead' (1948) by Norman Mailer (b. 1923), and 'From Here to Eternity' (1951) by James Jones¹ (b. 1921). Both men lash the incompetence and stupidity of the brasshats and express the tragic futility of war with a finality that anticipates the existentialist negation of accepted social values. John Hersey (b. 1914) wrote a series of effective novels dealing with various aspects of the war². All of these writers detect an element of fascism in the American war machine itself. All of them are obsessed by their own helplessness. Their 'positive heroes' are frustrated and go down to defeat. But their hatred and rejection of war are unmistakable. Indeed,

(contd. from p. 59)

in 1952. His novels were written in English, but his later works (preponderantly sketches and short stories) are mostly written in German and he now ranks as a German writer.

1 Jones returned to the theme of the war in some of his later works, e.g. 'The Thin Red Line' (1962)

² 'A Bell for Adano' 1944 (the invasion of Italy), 'Hiroshima' 1946, 'The Wall' 1950 (the desperate revolt of the Warsaw ghetto), 'The War Lover' 1959 (the mentality of a callous bomber pilot).

they are not war novels in the proper sense of the word at all: they are anti-war novels.¹

IV The second best-bellwa (1945-59)

I. The general background: The peace was followed by an immediate regrouping of forces and it was some time before the interests and attitudes involved fell into a recognisable pattern. In fact the 'cold war' began immediately in 1945 though it took some time to take effect. The first flush of victory was followed by a mood of scepticism and dismay. The peace turned out to be a precarious, perhaps only temporary one. The theory of relativity, which revealed the all but incalculable potentialities of nuclear energy, seemed to call into question the very prospects of human life in the universe. Science seemed to have outstripped the limits imposed by the interests of society.

¹ It is hard to agree with the Soviet critic R.M. Samarin (in 'Problems of the Literature of the USA', Moscow (1970), who lumps Mailer, Jones and Hersey together under the heading 'the militaristic novel', however much such a label may apply to some of the novels about the Korean war in the fifties, and still more to those about the Vietnamese war in the sixties (Wilson, Sack, Taylor, Kolpacoff). These authors are not discussed here on account of their doubtful literary value. Others, such as Upton Sinclair with his 'Lanny Budd' series in the forties or Uris in the sixties, have been omitted on account of their hostility to the Soviet Union. Nor need we dwell on Joseph Heller's spectacularly successful bestseller 'Catch-22' (1961): though decidedly not militaristic, its treatment of the war in the 'black comedy' manner is perhaps too unfamiliar to be quite acceptable to the Soviet reader.

But we cannot ignore the novels of Kurt Vonnegut (1922), especially 'Cat's Cradle' (1963) and 'Slaughterhouse Five' (1969). Their likable, eccentric anti-heroes reject the

When the revelations of the tragic consequences of the so-called "personality cult" in the Soviet Union began to leak through many intellectuals were stamped out of their faith in socialism.

This feeling of uncertainty and disillusionment was intensified by the powerful counter-offensive of the forces of reaction. Progressive writers were mobbed and victimised all over the country. The sensational and demagogic trial of ten left-wing script-writers and producers at Hollywood in 1947 (the "Hollywood Ten") unleashed a wave of hysterical witch-hunting that swept through the country, reaching its climax with the establishment of the notorious Committee for the Investigation of Un-American Activities. The McCarthy persecutions made normal literary activities impossible. A number of progressive writers (Malraux, Past, Lawson, Bessie; Ring Lardner jun., b. 1915; Carl Marzani b. 1912; Dalton Trumbo, b. 1905) were thrown into prison. Some authors (Arthur Miller, Lillian Hellmann) refused to testify before the Committee; others (such as Odets) chose the line of least resistance and renounced or minimised their revolutionary past.

In these circumstances the democratic traditions in American literature suffered serious losses. Upton Sinclair who had already taken up a hostile attitude to the Soviet Union during the war, withdrew into the ivory castle of "individual socialism". Dos Passos abandoned his former radical sympathies. Wright had moved to Paris immediately after the war and Past defected from the labour movement after the tragic events in Hungary in 1956.

The general tone of literature now became dark and bewildered. There is a world of difference between the surging vitality of Wright's early work and the hopeless resignation of 'The Long Dream' (1958), or even - to
(contd. from p. 61)

established order. They are strongly mixed of fact and imaginations, combining elements of sci-fic with the documentary novel.

quote another typical example out of many - between the sharp social awareness of Penn Warren's 'All the King's Men' (1946) and the deep pessimism of 'The Cave' (1959). One may note a certain retreat from realism, or rather the conception of realism itself becomes more problematical. At the beginning of the fifties Hemingway was universally acclaimed as the greatest modern American writer; but before the end of the decade he was supplanted by Faulkner. Could this be construed to mean that life was no longer so simple as it had once seemed to be; that the old straightforward issues had been lost in a labyrinth of tortuous obscurity?

Before the war Freudian psychoanalysis and the stream-of-consciousness technique - then so daring and controver- sial - had helped the writer to plunge beneath the surface. Now these methods seem inadequate. The key to the literature of the post-bellum is to be sought in three character- istic tendencies which combine to form a qualitatively new attitude to life. Firstly the process of alienation is intensified. This tendency was not a new one and, as Marx pointed out, it was the inevitable consequence of the process of expropriation on which all forms of class society are based. In literature it may be defined as the treat- ment of man's environment in both nature and society as something indifferent to his needs, if not essentially hostile. It is expressed - usually unconsciously - either in the writer's imagery or in his attitude to his subject- matter. From now on this conception gains ground so rapidly that it may be regarded as one of the basic trends of the contemporary scene. Secondly we have the rapid growth of existentialism, which soon invades every branch of American literature so that the Marxist critic Sidney Finkelstein has indicated the presence of existentialist elements in nearly every outstanding writer of the

period.¹ The third tendency, which has important affinities with the two preceding ones, is the importation of Japanese Zen Buddhism and the doctrines of the ancient Chinese philosopher Chuang Tse. These schools of thought, which derive from Chinese Taoism and advocate the free self-identification of the individual with the spontaneous movements of nature, profoundly influenced Salinger and contributed one of the central themes of the Beat generation.²

In conclusion it should be pointed out that the ideological struggle continued, though in different forms. The progressive tradition, now on the defensive, kept up a dogged, in some cases heroic rearguard action. Reaction, more vocal and self-assured than ever before, was represented by the so-called New Criticism and the conformist novel. In between we have the various currents of bourgeois critical realism and the spontaneous non-conformism of declassed elements of the intelligentsia and the petty bourgeoisie.

We have now to reduce the confused and changing kaleidoscope of the decade to some sort of pattern. But it must be remembered that the arrangement suggested can only be a provisional one. Writers often vacillate between one position and another, or even contradict themselves.

¹ In his thought-provoking book 'Alienation and existentialism in American literature' (1967) he refers specifically to Faulkner, Albee, Bellow, Salinger, Henry Miller, Des Passos and many others.

² Perhaps the first time since the early Middle Ages that eastern ideas exercised a direct influence on the social ideas of the west.

About the middle of the decade several writers (Mailer, Algren and others) drew close to the Beat though their basic contributions belong elsewhere.

2. Progressive literature. In spite of the quasi-fascist reign of terror of the McCarthy period there remained a firm nucleus of progressive writers, reinforced by the representatives of the younger generation: Philip Benesky (b. 1916), Jay Deiss, Felix Jackson and others. But throughout the greater part of the fifties they were isolated figures, lacking the mass popular basis enjoyed by their predecessors in the thirties.

3. Conservative and reactionary tendencies. These were most clearly expressed in two main fields:

a. The "New Criticism". This was not confined to America. It had already been launched by T.S.Eliot in England in the late twenties,¹ but it was first widely taken up in the United States after the war. Its adherents tended to treat literature as something "for itself" and condemned all attempts to connect literature with politics and social ideas. This reversed the generally accepted axiom of the thirties (and of Marxist criticism) that the value of literature depends on its social content. The new attitude was first expounded by Bernard DeVote in 1944, but it was widely adopted in the fifties, especially by the Southern critics Allen Tate (b. 1899), John Crowe Ransom (b. 1888) and Cleanth Brooks (b. 1906).²

¹ He defined his stand in 1927 as "classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and Anglo-Catholic in religion".

² We should, perhaps, add a word on literary criticism in general. After Poe we find little consistent work in this

b. The Conformist novel. We have now, for the first time and in open contravention of the whole tradition of American literature, a new type of novel which deliberately sets out to defend the Establishment and discredit the ideas of social criticism and reform. The conformist novels are few in number, but symptomatic of the time. The first example was 'The Caine Mutiny' by Herman Wouk (B. 1915), which created an understandable sensation when it came off the press in 1951. Other conformist writers were Slean Wilson and (from the end of the decade) Allen Drury. There was a subtle but discernible conformist element in

contd. from p. 65

field (apart from a few personal statements, manifestoes, etc.). But during the thirties criticism rapidly increased in volume and after the Second World War the output has been enormous, largely owing to the great number of universities, colleges, etc., where research in American literature is regularly carried on. Not all of this work has been of equal value. There has been a natural tendency to overestimate the importance of some native writers. But enough has been achieved to put the United States well in advance of Western Europe in both the quantity and the quality of its literary criticism. The Marxist outlook is represented by Granville Hicks, Malcolm Cowley and the critics of the Communist press, the liberal-democratic tendency by Vernon Parrington, the orthodox academic approach by Van Wyck Brooks, Van Derem, Ganby and others. The young critics of the post-bellum (Alfred Kassin, Harry Levin, Leelle Fiedler, Philip Young) have proposed many new, revealing and stimulating ideas.

the works of James Gould Cozzens^I (b. 1903).

At the other end of the scale we plumb the depths of depravity and vulgarity in the quasi-fascist absurdities of Mike Spillane, which, though they cannot be called "literature" in any serious sense of the word, certainly have their place in the cultural scene.²

4. Spontaneous petty-bourgeois non-conformism. Under this head we link one of the most reticent and sensitive writers of the fifties and what is probably the noisiest and most extrovert movement in the whole history of American literature.

a. Jerome D. Salinger (b. 1919) caught the authentic voice of the younger generation in his brilliant short novel 'The Catcher in the Rye' (1951). He failed to maintain his high level in his subsequent collections of sketches and short stories and his work is crippled by his persistent refusal to approach the great social issues. But within his limitations he expresses with deeper

^I Cozzens, active since the 1920s, scored a brief but spectacular success with his complex psychological novel 'By Love Possessed' (1957), hailed by many critics at the time as the supreme achievement of the century.

² The first of these, written in 19 days in 1942, established a simple formula, repeated with slight variations: 13 chapters with almost as many murders; an Athletic American agent at grips with a sinister Communist intellectual, or a Russian or Chinese spy; a beautiful girl subjected to sadistic violence. These unchanging ingredients are used to demonstrate the political maxim: "Better dead than red".

sympathy than any of his contemporaries the anguished quest of the American adolescent for a set of genuine moral values applicable to the post-war world.

B. The Beat Generation. The contribution of the Beat^I to literature has possibly been exaggerated, but its importance as a social movement cannot be denied. It reflected the outlook of a large nomadic section of the youth, many from wealthy middle-class families, who were united by a common refusal to admit social responsibilities and conventional standards of behaviour. They formed colonies in many large cities (especially San Francisco), but they were also attracted to nature (as the antithesis of civilisation), alternating their jazz orgies with bouts of hiking and mountaineering. They found a kindred attitude in the unsophisticated spontaneity of the Negro and the intuitive opportunism of Zen Buddhism. They emphasised their emancipation by indulgence in free love, crime and narcotics. Essentially modern, they nevertheless answer to a long-standing tradition of American literature and their slogan of disaffiliation - though differently expressed - may be traced back to the secessionist attitude of the Lost Generation, or even Thoreau. Their characteristic attempt to achieve human solidarity on a basis of sheer self-assertiveness has its antecedents in Whitman.

For the rest they form a large, diffuse, obstreperous group, dominating the second half of the decade. Their provocative insistence on sexual abnormality, pathological psychology and the hallucinations produced by drugs and

^I The origin of the word "Beat" would seem to connect it not with the idea of defeat, but with the rhythm or pulse of jazz music as expressive of an attitude to life.

alcohol run counter to the principle of realism, but they represent a genuine mood of spontaneous pretest. After the first violent storm of opposition they were accepted and assimilated with surprising rapidity and few outstanding modern writers have escaped their influence.

For the purposes of the present survey we need mention only one or two of the outstanding names. The acknowledged spokesman of the movement, who did much to popularise it through the press and TV, was Jack Kerouac (1922-69), author of a long series of loose, repetitive, effusive novels.^I But he was partly anticipated by Clellon Holmes, whose 'Go' appeared in 1952. The chief poets are Allen Ginsberg, G. Corso, F. Lamantia and L. Ferlinghetti. The drama is represented by Jack Gelber and others.

5. Critical realism. As we have seen the realist tradition continues, though it tends to recede into the background and is far less sure of itself. Many of the older writers (Hemingway, Faulkner, Steinbeck, Caldwell) continued to produce, though not without sharp fluctuations in method and achievement. Salinger might also have been included in this section.

Many of the new writers whose names have yet to be added come from the South. In fact (if we omit the conservative and somewhat parochial "Agrarian" group of the thirties, composed mainly of poets and critics) one

^I It must be admitted that they also have real human warmth, together with a contagious vitality that accounts for their wide-spread popularity. 'On the road' (1957) is usually regarded as marking the "breakthrough" of the movement.

of the most striking features of the post-bellum was the emergence of a large and powerful group of Southern novelists, all basically realist in approach though widely different in temperament. They include Robert Penn Warren (b. 1905), Carson McCullers (b. 1917), Truman Capote (b. 1925) and several others.

There is also a certain regionalist quality in Nelson Algren (b. 1909), whose brutal studies of the Chicago slums seem to begin where Farrell left off in the thirties. The picaresque novels of Saul Bellow (b. 1915) usually also have their point of departure in Chicago, but with their seething vitality, their wild adventures that carry us to Mexico, Europe, Africa, (often introducing a perceptible philosophical undertone), their crowded characters and vivid backgrounds, they are difficult to classify. At any rate there is nothing introvert about Bellow, and though he refrains from social comment he succeeds in building up what is perhaps the fullest canvas of the contemporary scene in his generation.

V Recent tendencies

I. The historical background. Certain signs indicate that a new stage begins about the turn of the decade. They are to be discerned most plainly in the political situation, though there are also significant changes in literature. The beginning of the sixties is marked by a dramatic intensification of the social struggle. The whole nation was shocked by a series of political murders^I of which the circumstances remained shrouded

^I Beginning with the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963.

in mystery. The confusion of the previous period gradually resolved into a regrouping of forces from which emerged the New Left and the student organisation SDS.^I Many pretest demonstrations against exploitation and corruption were held all over the country, often - as in other parts of the world - led by students. Then the struggle against segregation suddenly flared up into an unprecedented counter-offensive of the Negro population. New revolutionary organisations calling for active, even violent, methods came into being - the Black Power, Black Muslim and Black Panther movements. Spontaneous outbreaks in many of the great Negro ghettos in the north led to fierce armed clashes during the "long hot summers" of the middle years of the decade. After the war in Korea came the interminable, hopeless war in Vietnam, regarded by many Americans as the worst catastrophe that had ever befallen the United States.

2. The literary scene. In literature the changes were not so drastic, but they were strong enough to suggest the crystallisation of a new quality. Most of the writers mentioned under the fifties continued to produce. But the old giants - Sinclair Lewis, Hemingway, Faulkner, O'Neill, Sandburg, T.S.Eliot - were rapidly dropping out of the picture and their places were being filled by newcomers.

At the same time the general tone of literature was changing. The world was grimmer and bleaker than before and in this new situation the wave of petty bourgeois non-conformism subsided. The Beat parade of irresponsibility seemed inadequate and the Beatnik himself -

^I Students for a Democratic Society.

perhaps the central and most characteristic figure of the fifties - faded into the background, to be superseded by the hippie and flower-girl of the sixties. But these types were less articulate and have no place in literature.

Meanwhile the anti-realist elements - black comedy, the absurd, etc. - became more accentuated, but also more restricted in scope, affecting only a small group of "advanced" writers but leaving the vast majority untouched. Literature, taken as a whole, was more sober and the old interest in social problems began to return.

This change can best be followed in the older authors who were still writing at the beginning of the sixties, since in their case the new works can be readily compared with the old. After a period of relaxed tension Erskine Caldwell published five new books in as many years (1961-65), and such works as 'Jenny by Nature' (1961) and 'Close to Home' (1962) mark a substantial advance. The same might be said of Steinbeck: after experimenting in the field of mystic allegory ('Burning Bright', 1950; 'East of Eden', 1952; 'Sweet Thursday', 1957), he reverted to a more critical and realistic attitude in 'The Winter of Our Discontent' (1961). Perhaps it is significant that both writers embarked on a "voyage of discovery" with the object of finding out for themselves the truth about America.^I

^I Both recorded their experiences in the form of travel notes: Steinbeck in 'Travels with Charley' (1962), and Caldwell in 'Around About America' (1964) and 'In Search of Bisco' (a study of the Negro problem, 1965).

3. Conformist tendencies and commercial fiction.

Right-wing ideology was encouraged by the war in Vietnam, but in literature it was mainly confined to the field of cheap fiction. The only substantial achievement to be recorded here is the masterfully written, but subtly reactionary tetralogy of Allen Drury (begun with 'Advise and Consent' in 1959 and ending with the characteristic title 'Preserve and Protect' in 1968). We must also note Steinbeck's regrettable escapade in Vietnam shortly before his death; but in spite of the tremendous pressure such lapses were few among the writers of the older generation.^I

Bourgeois criticism made much of a new type of novel that began to appear about the beginning of the decade. Its chief representatives - William Burroughs, Vladimir Nabokov, John Hawkes, Richard Stern, William Pinchon - can hardly be said to form a school, but they have much in common: shockingly unconventional situations, fantastic plots, a quick delivery and a terse, sometimes savagely ironical turn of phrase. They have the same preoccupation with sex that we find in the best-sellers of the period, which range from the Hollywood saga 'Return to Peyton Place'² (1959) by Grace Metalious to the refined pornography of Jacqueline Suzanne's 'The Valley of Dolls' (1966). How near this kind of writing can come to mere hack-work was amusingly demonstrated by the scandalous history of 'Naked Came the Stranger' (1969). This book was written by 24 newspapermen,

^I Steinbeck aroused widespread indignation in 1964, when he demonstratively participated in a bombing raid in Vietnam.

² The sales of this novel ran into 10 million copies.

published under a pseudonym, became an outstanding best-seller and was discussed seriously by the critics before the secret was revealed.

Outside the pale of literature in the proper sense of the word we note the spate of "patriotic" novels about the Vietnamese war and the continued popularity of Mike Spillane, whose seven "novels" now top the 35mn mark.

4. The return to critical realism. The strengthening of the realist element was strikingly expressed in the emergence of a talented, vigorous and heterogeneous group of young Negro writers: Baldwin, Lleyd Brown, Killens, Motley, LeRoi Jones, to mention a few of the names that come to mind. Fresh forces were also at work in poetry and the drama. All these receive mention in the concluding sections of our survey and need not be dwelt upon here.

In the field of the novel and the short story we cannot fail to be impressed by the remarkable exhibition of new talent at the turn of the decade. A few examples will suffice to reveal the strength and vitality of this work, with new names, new books, new trends coming thick and fast: 1959 brings Bernard Malamud (b. 1914) with 'The Assistant' and Philip Roth with 'Goodbye Columbus'; 1960 adds Barbara Probst Solomon with 'The Beat of Life' and Harper Lee (b. 1926) with 'To Kill a Mocking-bird'; in 1961 we have Malamud's 'A New Life' and Benjamin Appel's (b. 1907) masterly exposure of the reactionary trade-union bureaucrat 'A Big Man, a Fast Man'. Perhaps not all of these names were entirely unfamiliar. But they now make themselves felt for the first time and the combined impression is that of the rise of a younger generation, more involved in the burning social problems

of the day. Yet other names might be added, though at this stage perhaps it is too early to estimate the weight of their permanent contributions to literature.

Nevertheless at least three writers seem already to have made a lasting mark. They are: John Cheever (b. 1912), with his widely acclaimed chronicles of family life, and possibly still more with his vivid sketches and short stories; William Styron (b. 1925), with his solid, well-documented epics of southern life and history; and John Updike (b. 1932), whose sensitive, almost lyrical, studies of the modern scene are impregnated with a sincere, if veiled and introspective, humanism.

MODERN AMERICAN POETRY

One of the most spectacular features of the sudden rise into prominence of modern American literature was the revival of poetry. By the end of the 19th century poetry - like the drama - had receded into the background. There was a general feeling that the Americans as a nation were more conspicuous for their business acumen than for their addiction to poetry. Whitman and Emily Dickinson had not yet come into their own. The New Englanders, Longfellow and Whittier, were figure-heads rather than figures. There was little that could be called new; and though the name of Edwin Markham (1852-1940) should not be forgotten, he may fairly be called a man of one poem.^I

Another transitional figure was Edwin Arlington Robinson (1869-1935), whose former tremendous reputation (culminating in three Pulitzer prizes in the 1920s) has since subsided. His first poems appeared in 1896 and he scored his first success with 'Captain Craig' in 1902. His work is curiously mixed, including dramatic monologues reminiscent of Browning, long narrative poems adapted from medieval chevaleresque legend and bitter, laconic comments on modern life in the pure Yankee idiom.

All the more startling was the change when it came.

^I This was 'The Man with the Hoe' (1899), referred to by H.L. Mencken as "the finest poem ever written in America".

At one bound American poetry assimilated the innovations of the French symbolists and moved to the head of the avant-garde. But traditional forms persisted side by side with the feverish experimentation of the modernist groups, so that the general picture was one of amazing variety. A mere glance at the outstanding names will confirm this impression of brilliant diversity. It will also help us to understand why no satisfactory answer can be given to the much-debated question: Who is the greatest American poet of the 20th century?¹

Classification is difficult. There are one or two more or less clearly defined groups and a handful of 'intractable' personalities who refuse to be pigeon-holed. Nearly all the main writers and currents emerge simultaneously just before the war. The "little magazines" led the way and Chicago was in the centre of the movement. Here Harriet Monroe launched her 'Poetry: a Magazine of Verse' in 1912, followed by Margaret Anderson's 'The Little Review' in 1914. The latter year saw the inauguration of the 'New Republic' and Mencken and Nathan's 'The Smart Set'.²

After a few tentative publications (by Pound, Amy

¹ The names suggested have included Sandburg, Frost, E.A. Robinson, Wallace Stevens, T.S.Eliot and Pound, all widely different in their approach.

² Others of the little magazines - some rather ephemeral - that "died to set verse free" were 'Fugitive', 'Transition', 'The Seven Arts', 'Dial'; important additions in the 1930s were 'The Kenyon Review', 'The Hudson Review' and the Marxist 'Partisan'.

Lowell and others), the ice began to break in 1913, when Vachel Lindsay made his debut with 'General William Beoth Enters into Heaven', Frost published 'A Boy's Will' (in England), and John Gould Fletcher no less than five volumes of poetry. But the real beginning came in 1914 with Masters' 'Spoon River Anthology', Sandburg's 'Chicago', Amy Lowell's 'Sword Blades and Poppy Seeds', and lastly Frost's 'North of Boston' and Pound's anthology 'Dee Imagistes' (both published in London). On the whole the years 1912-18 were a time of search and controversy, while the 1920s (1919-29) brought the full flood of recognition. But for the sake of convenience the two stages may be treated as one, the names remaining the same.

What may be called the popular, democratic American tradition was carried forward by the three Illinois poets Carl Sandburg (1878-1967), Edgar Lee Masters (1869-1950) and Vachel Lindsay (1879-1931), whose work constituted the backbone of the so-called "Chicago Renaissance".^I In some ways they were dissimilar. Lindsay used rhyme, the others free verse. The obsessive rhythms of Lindsay's "higher vaudeville" often concealed a regrettably confused and backward attitude. The dry, incisive irony of the epitaphs in the Spoon River graveyard are far removed from the hard-hitting tub-thumping of Sandburg in his best and most characteristic vein. But the affinities are also there - the descent from Whitman, with his cult of Lincoln; the appeal to the masses; the homely diction; the typically American flavour of life a thousand miles from the sea.

The "modern" wing was more cosmopolitan in tastes

^I A misnomer, as it was a birth, not a rebirth.

and origin. Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965), who was, and still is almost unanimously acclaimed by western critics as the greatest poet of the century, settled down in England in 1914 and became naturalised as a British citizen in 1927. Nevertheless we rank him provisionally as an American.¹ In fact he anticipates the growing cultural rapprochement (and the inevitable reaction against it) which, encouraged by the political and economic ascendancy of the United States, became a characteristic feature of the second post-bellum.² Fastidious, conservative, erudite, pessimistic, Eliot contrasts strangely and utterly with such poets as Sandburg. He wrote little and there are signs that his prestige is beginning to wane. But few poets have achieved such self-assured mastery of style and perhaps none have better expressed the tragic frustration of the declassed intellectual mesmerised by social forces he cannot hope to control.

Ezra Pound (b. 1885) was still more of a cosmopolitan. From 1907 onwards he lived continuously in Europe, finally settling down in Italy. To the general public he meant still less than Eliot until he became notorious for his support of fascism during the Second World War.

¹ This is the general viewpoint of American Marxist criticism. In the Soviet Union he has been largely ignored, but some Soviet reference works have mentioned him as an English writer.

² W.H. Auden became naturalised as an American citizen and many British writers followed the "brain drain" across the Atlantic.

his capture in 1945 and his sensational trial.¹ But his irascible temperament dominated the early impassioned search for new experimental techniques.

Imagism, a short-lived but also the largest and best-organized modernist group, was also cosmopolitan, at least in origin. Founded by Pound, who published the first Imagist anthology in London, it was soon taken over by Amy Lowell (1874-1925), who promptly transported it to the United States, where she published the annual collections entitled 'Some Imagist Poets' in 1915, 1916, and 1917. Imagism, too, was concerned rather with method than with content,² but it made an important contribution to the renovation of the poetic language. Its devoted band of enthusiasts also included 'H.D.'³ John Gould Fletcher, F.S. Flint and others.

Another modernist cénacle, which may be regarded as an off-shoot of the Imagist movement, united for a short while the authoritative but widely differing figures of William Carlos Williams (1883-1963),

¹ Pound was acquitted on grounds of insanity and a violent controversy broke out when, shortly after, he was awarded the Bollingen prize for literature in 1949.

² The method was perhaps one of distillation. Pound declared that "the point of Imagisme is that it does not use images as ornaments. The image is itself the speech." The English philosopher T.E. Hulme called it "no more nor less than a mosaic of words."

³ Hilda Doolittle (1886-1961), who was married for a short time to the leading English imagist poet Richard Aldington, later to become famous as the author of 'Death of a Hero'.

Wallace Stevens (1895-1955) and Marianne Moore (b. 1887). Of these three Stevens is sophisticated, reactionary, inscrutably recendite;¹ Williams, a man of democratic convictions (though they rarely find expression in his poetry),² produced a series of hard incisive miniatures before attempting the national epic 'Paterson' (1942-51); Marianne Moore is a delicate and introspective lyricist whose vivid miniatures contain rare examples of an attractive but slightly sentimental gift for social generalisation. The other women-poets of the period were somewhat more traditional though each made a distinctive contribution to the general pattern; they include Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892-1950), Elinor Wylie and Sara Teasdale.

To these names we have yet to add those of three poets who stand somewhat aloof from their generation but who contributed some of its most valuable and original achievements. Robinson Jeffers (1887-1962) worked almost exclusively in a form that had virtually died out with the 19th century - the long narrative poem. But there is nothing archaic or conventional about him. Plunging (like O'Neill) into the dark, fatalistic world of the Freudian subconscious he tells painful stories of aberrant sexual fixations, sometimes dignified (as in

¹ Nevertheless his difficult and controversial poem 'Sunday Morning' was called by Iver Winters "probably the greatest American poem of the twentieth century and ... certainly one of the greatest contemplative poems in English."

² Appointed consultant in poetry to the Library of Congress in 1952, Williams was prevented from taking office by the witch-hunters of the McCarthy era.

O'Neill by parallels drawn from the mythological world of the Greek tragedy. Nothing could be farther removed from the quiet landscapes, laconic comment and repressed but natural wistfulness of the 'farmer-poet' Robert Frost (1874-1963), who though born in California - Jeffers' adopted region - identified himself as a poet with the Bleak, forbidding countryside of Vermont and New Hampshire. Another chasm separates the traditionalist Frost from the extreme experimentalism of e.e.cummings¹ (1894-1962), the anarchical painter-poet, whose hatred of snobbery and convention, militant pacifism, disrespect for authority and romantic hedonism blow down the cobwebs of petty-bourgeois respectability like a breath of fresh air.

The vast majority of the new attitudes, names and achievements of the New Poetry belong to the effervescent twenties, certainly one of the great ages of American literature. Something was added by each of the following decades, but they can be dealt with more summarily.

The revolutionary thirties brought a heightened political awareness and the stress now shifted from experiment to social content. The two decades are linked by the long epic poem (stemming from Whitman and Sandburg and anticipating Carlos Williams' 'Paterson'), which reasserts the democratic traditions of American history. Powerful national epics of different types were written by Hart Crane² (1899-1932), Stephen Vincent Benét³

¹ The author's spelling.

² 'The Bridge' (1930).

³ 'Jehn Brown's Body' (1928).

(1898-1943) and Archibald MacLeish (b. 1892).¹ The latter, who played a leading role in the cultural programme attached to Roosevelt's New Deal,² was also - together with Maxwell Anderson - one of the principal exponents of the verse drama, which belongs rather to poetry than to the theatre.³

The Second World War marks an important stage in the development of modern American poetry. In fact poetry was the only branch of literature which reacted immediately and effectively to the new situation. Of the many war poets, quite apart from the "civilian poets", a score of names might be mentioned - names that were represented not only by individual poems but by more than one personal collection. Some of these (Karl Shapiro, b. 1913, Randall Jarrell, b. 1914, Stanley Kunitz, b. 1905, Richard Eberhart, b. 1912, for example) survived to occupy a definite, though perhaps modest, place in post-war literature. As they were all men who saw active service their work was concrete and direct. War poetry, like the war novel, abhorred and often ridiculed the sentimental rhetoric of official patriotism. Needs varied from hard-boiled reporting to a passionate reaffirmation of the basic human values.

¹ 'Memorial Rain' (1930), 'Burying Ground by the Ties' (1933), Pulitzer prize for 'Conquistador' (1932)

² During the war MacLeish was Director of the Office of Facts and Figures, which later developed into the U.S. Information Service; after the war he was active in UNESCO.

³ 'The Fall of the City' (1937), an allegorical warning against fascism, was a radio play.

There was much satire of the profiteers, brasshat brutality, government incompetence. Everywhere we feel a general determination to wipe out the old flaws in American democracy (class differences, exploitation, racial discrimination) after fascism has been destroyed. The poetic language was renewed by the introduction of the forcibly acquired innumerable technicalities of the machine war. These were not always intelligible to the lay reader, but they were at least vivid, evocative and real.

After the war poetry loses much of its vitality. Much of the work of the Beat poets (Gregory Corso, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Philip Lamantia and others) seems, at this distance, too loose and declamatory to establish a permanent appeal. Perhaps only Allen Ginsberg (b. 1926) succeeded in striking a note of anarchic protest against the horrors of capitalism with his poem 'Howl' (1956), the impact of which was intensified by the sensational trial of 1957, in which he was publicly absolved of a charge of obscenity. Later he reinforced the socio-political content of his poetry by his active support of the international campaign against the war in Vietnam.

But the dominant mood of the Beat was escapism rather than protest and though attempts were made to renew contact with the masses by reciting verses to the accompaniment of jazz music, etc., it was difficult to avoid slipping into the hippie attitude. Meanwhile the serious reading public was dwindling. Kenneth Rexroth (b. 1905), who published a dozen volumes of poetry in the fifties, tells us that a sale of 2000 copies was the most a successful poet could hope for (far less than the average figures for Estonian poetry during the same period!).

The most serious personality of the post-war period is undoubtedly that of Robert Lowell (b. 1917), with his thoughtful and deeply disturbing studies of the New England background he tried to reject.¹ At the end of the fifties new names might be added: Theedere Reethke, Richard Wilbur, Thomas McGrath, Elizabeth Bishop, John Berryman and others. The progressive anthologies compiled by the poet Walter Lowenfels (b. 1897) in the sixties contain a wealth of talented contributions by young writers, many of them Negroes. But more time must pass before they can be brought into perspective.

¹ Lowell left Harvard, entered the Catholic Church and went to prison during the war as a conscientious objector.

THE AMERICAN THEATRE

After Royall Tyler's solitary achievement 'The Contrast' (1787) the American theatre falls into a state of abeyance lasting more than a century. Perhaps the survival of the Puritan spirit has something to do with it, for we find that a bowdlerised version of 'Othello' was performed under the title of 'Dialogues on moral themes' at Rhode Island in 1762, while 'Hamlet' appeared as 'Filial Duty: an Edifying Story' in Philadelphia. As late as 1850 comedies were billed as "lectures" at Boston. The fact remains that the 19th century was almost a complete void as far as the theatre was concerned. Who remembers nowadays that Bret Harte, Mark Twain, W.D.Hewells all tried their hand at the drama? Certainly it was not until the nineties that we have any indication of original native talent. A minor landmark in the movement towards the creation of a realistic drama was 'Margaret Fleming' (1890) by James Herne (1839-1901), a friend of W.D.Hewells and Hamlin Garland. Then there were the colourful, sentimental plays of the Irish actor-playwright Den Boucicault, the mere sober social and historical dramas of Bronson Howard and the romances of David Belasco, who supplied the librettos for two of Puccini's operas.¹

The important impulse derived from Ibsen in the opening decade of the new century is clearly expressed in the work of Clyde Titch (1865-1909). Then came the influences of the European naturalists (Becque, Gerky,

¹ 'Madame Butterfly' (1900) and 'The Girl of the Golden West' (1905).

Hauptmann), expressionists (Strindberg, Kaiser, Wedekind, Toller) and symbolists (Maeterlinck).¹ All of these were assimilated by the 'little theatre movement', which played a role in the creation of the experimental drama similar to that of the 'little reviews' in the revival of poetry. Still more important was the English 47 course organised by Prof. George Pierce Baker at Harvard University. This was the famous "47 workshop" (1909-25), attended at various times by O'Neill, Howard, Behrman, Barry and other leading dramatists. Soon there were amateur troops operating in various parts of the country. It was the Provincetown Players (1915-25), formed in a summer colony in Massachusetts, who first staged O'Neill's plays, beginning with 'Bound East for Cardiff' (1916). Before long they were running a little theatre in Greenwich Village. Here they produced steadily,² becoming the main centre of the movement. Other experimental groups were the Toy Theatre in Boston, the Little Theatre in Chicago and the Washington Square Players at Greenwich Village.³

¹ These influences were reinforced in the twenties by those of the Berlin Freie Bühne and Stanislavsky's Moscow Art Theatre.

² During the ten years of their existence the Provincetown Players staged 96 plays by 47 different authors.

³ In 1918 the Washington Square Players were reorganised as the Theatre Guild, which in the course of time became more conservative and was eventually assimilated by the commercial theatres.

From this maze of experiment emerges the tragic and fascinating figure of *Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953), who kept up an unending stream of plays groping in the most startlingly different directions.^I With all his faults (his ideas are confused and his doomed characters, too often the victims of hereditary sexual aberrations, fall short of true greatness), he created a vivid world of suffering and frustration brought to life by a genuine flair for popular speech and an imposing battery of novel technical devices.

By the end of the 1920s the picture was rapidly filling up. Elmer Rice (1892-1967), Sidney Howard (1891-1939), Philip Barry (1896-1949), Robert Sherwood (1896-1955), were all turning out original and effective plays of all sorts, ranging from straightforward realist drama to the wittiest satirical allegories of the absurdities of the capitalist machine age, while Maxwell Anderson (1888-1959) was already well-launched on the long career that was to lead him from the serious problem play and the comedy of manners to poetized history and the strange philosophical verse tragedy of 'Winterset' (1935), in which the Hamlet-motif is worked up into a bitter condemnation of the legal murder of Sacco and Vanzetti.

But, still more than the twenties, the thirties proved to be the golden age of the American theatre. The brilliant technical innovations of the first period now

^I O'Neill staged more than 40 plays in his life. He destroyed many others during the twelve years of silence (1934-46), when he passed through a profound mental crisis.

served the acute class conflicts and agitated intellectual fermentation of the Revolutionary Decade. Rarely - in any country or period - has there been a drama so wholeheartedly devoted to the cause of social struggle. Its political alignment was imposed by a large number of progressive organisations. Already in the twenties the New Playwrights' Theatre (1927-29) had been set on foot by Michael Gold, Des Pusses and John Howard Lawson (b. 1894). Their work was taken up by the workers' theatres of the thirties, many of which were affiliated to the New Theatre League¹ (1932-42). This organisation continued the tradition of the little theatres, but with a far more pronounced political bias. While avoiding direct party affiliation it put forward a platform of struggle "against war, fascism and the censorship." It published a number of magazines,² awarded prizes to outstanding proletarian plays and ran the New Theatre School for actors, playwrights and producers in New York.

The most active productive centre of the proletarian theatre was the Theatre Union (1933-37), which was also situated in New York, but had branches in Philadelphia, San Francisco, New Orleans and elsewhere. The vast majority of militant working-class plays passed through its hands and it united the leading revolutionary dramatists of the period: Maltz, Lawson and Stevensen, George

¹ This was an offshoot of the Workers' Laboratory Theatre in New York; in 1935 it was renamed the League of Workers Theatres.

² These included 'Workers Theatre' (from 1932), the monthly 'New Theatre' (1933-37) and the quarterly 'Theatre Workshop' (from 1936).

Sklar (b. 1908), Paul Peters (b. 1900), Paul Green (b. 1898), John Wexley (b. 1907) and others.

Close to the labour movement was the famous Group Theatre (1931-41), founded by Harold Clurman, who visited the Soviet Union in 1933 and 1935 and studied under Stanislavsky in both Moscow and Paris. It produced plays by Sidney Kingsley (b. 1906), Sareyan and Irwin Shaw. Above all it was the vehicle for the sensational series of proletarian plays by Clifford Odets (1906-63), beginning with his masterpiece 'Waiting for Lefty' (1935), written at white heat (in three days) for a one-act play centreat sponsored by the New Theatre League, and as an illustration of his thesis - reiterated as late as 1939 - that "we are living in a time when new art works should shoot bullets".

Mention should also be made of the Federal Theatre Project (1935-39) which, although subsidised by the state and integrated into the New Deal cultural programme, developed into a genuine centre of mass theatrical activity and created a number of new dramatic forms such as the "living newspaper editions", in which dialogue, comment, pantomime, song, documentary film, etc., were adroitly combined.

The organisations briefly listed here may be taken as a measure of the tremendous vitality of the drama during the years of the depression. Many of the writers mentioned above also wrote scripts for the cinema, sometimes (as in the case of Odets) with regrettable repercussions on the quality of their work. To their names, which need no further discussion, we must add that of Lillian Hellman (b. 1905), a staunch anti-fascist and one of the most consistent exponents of critical realism in the American theatre.

The post-bellum was a period of decline. The little theatres¹ continued their efforts to break down the "fourth wall", but on a reduced scale. The commercial theatre,² competing now with both film and TV, hovered on the verge of bankruptcy³. After the war the workers' theatres remained closed and at one time 90% of the members of the theatre workers' union Actors Equity were unemployed. The old spirit of enthusiastic advance gave place to a mood of introspective retreat and moral anguish.

The major figures stand out against this forbidding background. Arthur Miller (b. 1915), working slowly but persistently, from 1947 onwards produced an imposing series of searching problem plays dissecting fascism as

¹ The Arena theatres in Dallas and Washington, the Alley theatre in Houston, the Actors' Workshop in San Francisco and the Penthouse at Washington University still did useful work.

² The acknowledged centre of the commercial theatre is Broadway, New York, where no less than 28 theatres are clustered together in the immediate vicinity of Times Square. Here the theatre has become a large-scale capitalist enterprise. Profits are sometimes high: the returns for the 1958/59 season were estimated at over 37 million dollars and a successful show has been known to net half a million. But expenses are also high. The lavish set for Tennessee Williams' 'Sweet Bird Of Youth' in 1959 cost \$ 150,000.

³ Of 78 premiers in the 1951/52 season, 52 were failures.

a question of moral responsibility, probing the basic ethics of capitalist society and hitting back at the witch-hunts in 'The Crucible' (1953). His sobriety may be contrasted with the talented, irritable work of Tennessee Williams (b. 1911) whose thirty odd plays (1940-63) build up into a painful picture of degeneration in the deep south, mainly expressed through the brooding sexual inhibitions of his female characters.

Otherwise the scene is confused. There is a strain of realism even in the musical (e.g. 'West Side Story', 1959). There are plays against war, hysterical farces, bitter satires, social dramas. No one would deny the progressive element in such authors as Lorraine Hansberry, Gore Vidal (b. 1925), Arnaud d'Usseau (b. 1916), James Gew (b. 1907), Frank Gilroy, Kenneth Brown, LeRoi Jones, W. Hanley and many others, but it is too early to single out the key names who may be expected to occupy a permanent place in American literature, and some of their later work seems strained and unbalanced. At the other end of the scale we have the extreme forms of violence and the absurd, as exemplified in the productions of Arthur Kopit (b. 1937), George Hitchcock or W. Inge. The most significant playwright of the sixties is undoubtedly Edward Albee (b. 1928) who derives from Beckett and Ionesco but, adding a play a year, has built up a consistent original drama of his own in which the situations and technique of the absurd have been treated not as an end in themselves, but as a vehicle of revealing psychological analysis with clear implications of social criticism.

A M E R I C A N N E G R O L I T E R A T U R E

This brief concluding note on American Negro literature¹ has been deliberately reduced to a minimum, not with any desire to minimise the importance of the subject, but in order to avoid leaving the misleading impression that Negro literature is something alien, something apart from the broad stream of American culture. Actually the Negro element is an inseparable component of the cultural tradition, a product of the same environment springing out of the same social conditions and linked with it at every phase of its development. At the same time it would be idle to deny the differences in temperament. Together with the vast flood of immigration in the 19th century these have surely added something valuable to the American 'way of life', infusing it with a vitality it might otherwise never have possessed.

But it was long before the Negro, condemned to illiteracy, was given the chance to indulge in cultural expression. The first Negro poem to find its way into print appeared in 1760². Thirteen years later it was

¹ We do not attempt to follow the evolution of the theme of the Negro in American literature - a fascinating subject that would lead us from Sewall and Jefferson, through Hildreth, Beecher-Stowe, Joel Chandler Harris, Twain and many others to Sinclair Lewis, Erskine Caldwell, Fast, Faulkner and William Styron in our own age.

² Its author was Jupiter Hamden (ca. 1720-1800).

followed by a slim volume of religious verses, the work of the slave-girl Phyllis Wheatley (1753?-1784). But these first steps were checked by the achievement of independence itself. Jefferson's bid to abolish slavery was frustrated by the Federalists and throughout the greater part of the 19th century it was a maxim of both social prejudice and government policy that the Negroes should be denied education in the interests of "public order". The heroic struggle for emancipation was fought by both whites and Negroes - the latter in far more difficult conditions; and no survey of American literature, however brief, can ignore such names as Frederick Douglass (1817-95), the former slave who became one of the acknowledged leaders of the abolitionist movement, or Booker T. Washington (ca 1856-1915), the great educationalist, who founded the first high school for Negroes¹ at Tuskegee in 1881.

But victory in the Civil War only introduced a new period of deferred hopes and the promised reconstruction of the South was stifled at birth.² At the very end of the 19th century we encounter the first Negro writer, Paul Lewis Dunbar (1872-1906), whose lyric poems, and equally lyrical stories and novels, written partly in dialect, have their place in American literature. By this time certain Negro elements, such as the "coon shews" or

¹ The Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute.

² Indeed it was not until the 1960s (a hundred years after the end of the war) that racial equality acquired a dimension of reality - a reality not of accomplished fact, but of organised mass struggle.

"Negre minstrels", were becoming an accepted feature of American cultural life.¹

In the 20th century the social background changed radically. The bulk of the Negre population shifted from the agrarian South to the industrial North, where it was concentrated in ghettos in the large cities. After the Great War of 1914-18, Afro-American culture became a powerful international influence. Negre folk art inspired the avant-garde in painting and sculpture. Above all Negre folk music,² especially in its sophisticated urbanised forms, took the world by storm. And this was more than an assertion of the Negre spirit: it was a victory of democratisation, of popular American culture in its broadest sense. The Negre writers of the early twenties - Claude McKay (1890-1948), William White and others - took up a stand of petty-bourgeois radicalism, close to the working-class movement. McKay was joint editor of 'The Liberator' and visited Soviet Russia in 1922.³ But this tendency soon gave place to the jazzified local-colour movement known as the "Harlem tradition", of which the most talented representatives were Countee Cullen (1903-46) and Jean Toomer.

In the Red Decade Negre literature swings back to its former class-conscious attitude and the historical

¹ The "coon show" was one of the predecessors of the modern "musical".

² The "blues" were songs of everyday life, sad and gay, often sharply satirical; the traditional religious songs were called "spirituals".

³ Later McKay turned his back on politics, lived ten years in France and became a Catholic in 1942.

novels of Arna Bontemps (b. 1902) take up the theme of revolutionary struggle. The greatest American Negro poet is Langston Hughes (1902-67), a leading militant of the labour movement, who created a new type of protest poem based on the purely Negro idiom of the traditional folksong. Prose was dominated by the powerful figure of Richard Wright (1908-60), who produced a series of volcanic masterpieces during the brief period of his progressive affiliation (1938-45).¹

When the patriarchal figure of W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963) rose into prominence after the Second World War, he already had a lifetime of persistent social activity behind him.² He is primarily a historian and sociologist, but belongs to literature by reason of his great Mansart trilogy 'The Black Flame' (1957-61).

The transition to the sixties was marked, as we have seen, by a dramatic intensification of the Negro struggle for social equality. It was accompanied by an unprecedented activation of Negro literature. Negro Writers' Conferences were held in 1959 and 1965,

¹ 'Uncle Tom's Children' (1938), 'Native Son' (1940), 'Black Boy' (1945). In 1946 Wright moved to Paris, where he remained until his death.

² His first published works date back to the end of the 19th century. He played a leading role in the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of the Coloured Population), helped to found the Pan-African movement and was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He died in Accra, Ghana, working on his last great project, the Encyclopedia Africana.

stressing the fact that the Negro element is part and parcel of American culture as a whole. Certainly this element has never been so strong, so conscious of its rights and so assertive of its cultural tradition as it has become in recent years; and the most striking proof of this vitality may be seen in the brilliant Negro writing of the sixties including - to mention only a few of the outstanding names - the novelists Willard Motley (1912-65), Lloyd Brown (b. 1913), Ralph Ellison (b. 1914) and John Killens (b. 1916); the dramatist Lorraine Hansberry (1930-65), many new poets and such sharply contrasted but equally versatile temperaments as those of James Baldwin (b. 1924) and LeRoi Jones (b. 1934).

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