

(1) African American Literature from 1940s to 1960s

Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, Langston Hughes

Abolitionism

- Europe
 - started with the Enlightenment and became an influential moment seeking to abolish slavery and slave trade
 - slavery was first abolished in France (1794) during the Revolution, though Napoleon re-established it (1802)
 - Great Britain banned slave importation in the Slave Trade Act (1807), the United States followed a year later
 - Great Britain became the first country to completely abolish slavery by the **Slavery Abolition Act (1833)**
- America
 - the United States banned slavery in the Northwest Territories¹ by passing the Northwest Ordinance (1787)
 - the United States passed the Fugitive Slave Law (1850) enforcing individuals to report on a runaway slave
 - the Civil War (1861–1865) confronted the Confederation of the South and the victorious Union of the North
 - Lincoln's **Emancipation Proclamation (1865)** became the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution

Harlem Renaissance (1920s)

- Features
 - an African American cultural movement which sought to develop artistic but also political and social activities
 - introduced the new themes of the pride of racial origin, celebration of ethnic groups and absence of legal rights
 - emphasized their contribution to culture in their having brought **blues** to Mississippi and **jazz** to New Orleans
 - enabled by the Great Migration from the rural South to the urban North, in particular the Northwest and East
 - dissolved with the shrinking audience and publishing opportunities with onset of the Great Depression (1929)
- Supporters
 - supported by the **NAACP** (since 1909), the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People
 - produced a seminal anthology of fiction, poetry and essays, *The New Negro* (1925), edited by **Alain Locke**
 - launched the careers of Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Jean Toomer, Claude McKay, Zora Neale Hurston
 - profited from the activities of the moderate Booker T. Washington as well as the militant W. E. B. Du Bois

Segregation

- Public Transport
 - Jim Crow Laws (1876–1965): introduced the segregation of whites and blacks who were 'separate but equal'
 - **Plessy v. Ferguson (1892–1896)**: Homer Plessy, a black octolune, was arrested for sitting in a white coach on a railway in Louisiana, four years later the ruling put racial segregation under the protection of the federal law
 - Rosa Parks (1913–2005): the first black woman who refused to give up her seat in a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, to a white man (1955), was arrested, which started a wave of non-violent protests, as the Bus Boycott
- Educational Institutions
 - **Brown v. Board of Education** of Topeka, Kansas (1954): Oliver Brown, a black man, fought for his daughter to be able to attend a nearer white school, Ferguson's decision was overruled and segregated schools abolished²
 - Little Rock Nine (1957): Little Rock, Arkansas, was the first high school to enrol nine black students, the city governor disapproved and sent troops to prevent the Nine from entry, then US army was sent to guard the Nine
 - Thurgood Marshall (1908–1993): a lawyer who legally challenged the segregation laws in the area of schools

Civil Rights Movement

- Leaders
 - an exacerbation of mostly non-violent protests led Martin Luther King and Malcolm X in the 1950s and 1960s
 - **Martin Luther King Jr.** (1929–1968, assassinated): advocate of non-violent resistance and civil disobedience
 - **Malcolm X**³ (1925–1965, assassinated): advocate of any means necessary to succeed, including violence
- Actions
 - Black Panther Party (1966–1976): a military party following Malcolm X and spreading the Black Power views
 - the Nashville, Tennessee, sit-ins (1960): a series of large-scale protest sit-ins directed against lunch counters that refused to serve black people, the protesters kept on sitting peacefully at the counters till closing time
 - March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (1963): a protest march attended by a quarter of million people, during which Martin Luther King delivered his most famous speech 'I Have a Dream' at the Lincoln Memorial
 - **Civil Rights Act of 1964**: the result of the 1963 March, extended voting rights and outlawed racial segregation

Black Arts Movement (1965–1975)

- Black Power
 - an artistic branch of the Black Power Movement, started in Harlem by the writer and activist Amiri Baraka
 - supported radical nationalists in their struggle against whites and promoted black pride and black aesthetic
 - followed the new ethno-centric concept of an autonomous black culture independent from the white America

¹ Northwest Territories included the area east of the Mississippi River and north-west of the Ohio River.

² The responsibility to address the situation was left on individual schools, many adopted the label of private academies to avoid it.

³ Born Malcolm Little, dropped the white man's name, changing it to X, signifying the unknown name of his African ancestors.

Richard Wright (1908–1960)

Biography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • born into a family of an impoverished African American sharecropper on a cotton plantation in Mississippi • his father deserted the family (1913), his mother suffered her first stroke (1918) that left her partially paralysed • spent his childhood shuttled about among various relatives, also was placed for some time in an orphanage • finished his education at high school (1925), moved to Memphis where he took menial jobs and began writing • moved to Chicago (1927), moved to New York (1937), moved to Paris (1947) where he died as an expatriate
Upbringing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the characteristic tone of anguish and anger in his work is inspired by the deprivations felt in the Deep South • the deprivation was physical, he was poor and often hungry, as well as psychological, intellectual and spiritual • his mother and his maternal grandmother raised him with belief in rigid morals and harsh corporal punishment • his education was limited but also restrictive, he was deliberately denied access to the books he most needed • found inner fulfilment in books by H. L. Mencken⁴, Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, Sherwood Anderson
Chicago	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Depression made him go on relief, then joined the Federal Negro Theatre and the Federal Writer's Project⁵ • became active in radical politics, began writing poetry for the leftist journals <i>New Masses</i> and <i>Partisan Review</i> • joined the Chicago John Reed Club⁶ (1933), then officially became a member of the Communist Party (1936)
New York	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • became the Harlem editor of the Communist newspaper <i>Daily Worker</i> after his move to New York City • co-edited the short-lived literary magazine <i>New Challenge</i> which published African American writers • at first struggled to work out the relationship between the techniques of fiction and the tenets of Marxism • left the Communists (1944) after an accusation of anti-Stalinist sentiments and resistance to party discipline
Paris	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • visited France on the invitation of Gertrude Stein (1946), a year later returned to settle in Paris permanently • met Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and Simone de Beauvoir, immersed himself in existentialist philosophy • lectured in Europe on politics, racism and African American literature, published his collected lectures (1957)
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • his early works focus on the Great Migration of African Americans from the rural South to the urban North • his later works use art as a weapon but insist on a balance between the didactic load and the artistic sense • seeks to merge the Marxist analysis of society, the Freudian system of psychology and literary naturalism • his feeling for the pain and pathos of African American life gives his work the melancholy residue of the blues • his characters struggle against accepting the place of powerlessness and the role of subservience and silence • the struggle of characters leads into defiance that society regards as criminal and punishes by social rejection • sometimes the struggle leads characters directly into criminality and the consequent threat of legal punishment • haunted characters attempt to force people who occupy positions of power to see, hear and acknowledge them
Early Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Blueprint for Negro Writing' (1937) • an influential essay published in the <i>New Challenge</i> declaring his independence from bourgeois literary forms • argues that a Marxist conception of society offers the maximum freedom for an African American writer <p><i>Lawd Today</i> (written 1937, published 1963)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an experimental work about twenty-four hours in the life of a middle-class Chicago African American • modelled self-consciously after James Joyce's <i>Ulysses</i> (1922) and John Dos Passos's <i>U.S.A.</i> (1930–1936) <p><i>Uncle Tom's Children: Four Novellas</i> (1938)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a collection of four stories about racial prejudice, African American resistance and violence in the Deep South • the protagonists become increasingly rebellious against white demands as they find a collective means to resist • influenced by Gertrude Stein and Ernest Hemingway in handling serious issues in a simple naturalistic style
Fiction	<p><i>Native Son</i> (1940)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a novel about a young black man Bigger Thomas who accidentally murders the daughter of his white employer • based on an actual murder case turned into literature, like Theodore Dreiser's <i>An American Tragedy</i> (1925) • a publishing success, became the first book by an African American to be selected for the Book of Month Club • foreshadows his later existentialism with its issues of freedom, alienation, dread and identity through violence • explores the relation between where and who we are, our being in the world and our knowledge of ourselves • suggests the irreality of the protagonist's life on the edges of white society by using the Gothic and the surreal
Freedom Via Murder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the murder issues out of the fear conditioning the protagonist's life in a black ghetto of the Chicago South Side • the murder is presented as the product not of will but of circumstance and the desperate violence it engenders • the protagonist feels free for the first time in the prison for he thinks he has broken out of the prison of himself

⁴ H(enry) L(ouis) Mencken (1880–1956), a journalist, essayist and satirist; critic of American life, especially the uncultured middle class. Attacked ignorance, intolerance, frauds and fundamentalist religion. Author of the book of essays *A Book of Prefaces* (1917).

⁵ Projects sponsored by Work Progress Administration (WPA), a government employment agency under the New Deal in the 1930s.

⁶ A youth Communist organization named for John Reed (1887–1920), an American communist activist and muckraker journalist; reported first-hand on the Bolshevik Revolution (1917) in *Ten Days that Shook the World* (1919).

- he puts together the two worlds seen by him as ‘something the world gave him and something he himself had’
- his Communist lawyer Max tries to move him from identity built on hate and defiance to one founded on hope
- the protagonist fails as he lacks the social consciousness and capacity of articulation that Communism requires

Folklore ***Twelve Million Black Voices*** (1941)

- a book combining words and pictures to express the folk history of the African Americans in the United States

Auto-biography ***Black Boy*** (1945)

- an autobiographical story of the author’s life up until his move to Chicago where he hoped to find a freer life
- reveals that the South denied him a sense of his own humanity and identity and the chance to learn who he was
- considers identity a social construct, cultural rather than natural, that has to be won by struggling and suffering
- thinks the worst crime of white society to be their excluding his people from a sense of fully being in the world
- suggests that living for blacks in a world they never made is like **living in a dream** likely to change any time
- together with the next volume retells the American myth of personal reinvention and the making of an identity

American Hunger (1977)

- further chapters of the autobiography about his Chicago life and his disenchantment with the Communist Party
- describes how he found nothing but new forms of racial oppression and economic **deprivation in the North**
- explains that he broke with the Communist Party for it sought to control his intellectual and creative freedom

Existentialism ***The Outsider*** (1953), ***Savage Holiday*** (1954), ***The Long Dream*** (1958)

- shows characters cut off from the world around and from the past, making virtues of **isolation** and rootlessness
- the first mentioned for instance shows the search of a self-conscious African American intellectual for identity

Non-fiction ***Black Power*** (1954), ***The Color Curtain*** (1956), ***Pagan Spain*** (1957), ***White Man Listen!*** (1957)

- a result of his extensive travels in the 1950s to understand the origins and legacy of African American slavery
- places social oppression in a global context, linking racism in America to colonialism in Africa and Asia
- *Black Power: A Report of Reactions in a Land of Pathos* gives an account of a trip to the Gold Coast in Ghana
- *The Color Curtain* reports on the author’s coverage of a conference in Indonesia
- *The Pagan Spain* attempts to find answers to the history of slavery in the paradoxes of Spanish culture

Ralph Ellison (1914–1994)

Biography • born in Oklahoma, educated in a segregated school system, went South to Alabama to attend a black college
 • read modern poetry and in his reading of Eliot and Pound found a relationship between modern poetry and jazz
 • went to New York to seek out Richard Wright and to gather folk material that was to become part of his fiction

Writing • produced his early work under the influence of Wright and naturalism, but then slowly developed his own style
 • mixes realism, **surrealism**, symbolism, **folklore** and myth to face the brutal reality yet offer images of hope

Invisible Man (1952)

Structure • implements the author’s dream of inventing language as diverse as American culture and African American life
 • avoids getting trapped in one idiom by mixing more verbal forms and influences into one multicultural whole
 • develops the tradition of anecdote and tall tale, sermon and autobiography, journals and songs of the self
 • presents the novel as a myth celebrating a god’s death, travelling in the underworld and leading to a rebirth
 • qualifies also as a picaresque novel, as its wanderings explore the pluralities of American culture and identity

Invisibility • describes the experience of an anonymous black protagonist-narrator wandering through America in the 1930s
 • the protagonist struggles to come to terms with society that prevents his people from **knowing who they are**
 • he discovers himself invisible in that his black skin renders him nameless and anonymous in white society
 • he chooses from unsatisfactory alternatives suggesting the mythic opposition of the clearing and the wilderness
 • he can either give up his self to the role prescribed by society or escape into a formless territory without a self

Identity Phases • he journeys through various stages during which he tries on new roles, a fresh change of clothes and identity
 • begins in the South as a ‘darky’ subjected to ritual humiliations, then as a ‘college boy’ at a segregated school
 • continues in New York as a worker at a whitewash factory that is described as a paradigm of American society
 • becomes an activist by joining a group called the **Brotherhood**, a thinly disguised version of the Communists
 • following a race riot in Harlem retreats to an underground sewer where he stays while working on this book
 • ends up in a border area where he can understand his invisibility and address his readers through his writing

Essays ***Shadow and Act*** (1964), ***Going to the Territory*** (1986)

- his two collection of essays published during his lifetime

Posthumous ***Flying Home and Other Stories*** (1996), ***Juneteenth*** (1999)

- the former is a collection of six short stories, the latter an uncompleted novel, both published posthumously

James Baldwin (1924–1987)

- Biography**
- born in Harlem to a single mother, suffered at the hands of his stepfather, who was a fervent itinerant **preacher**
 - his stepfather **abused** his religious and parental power by insisting that James bore the ugly mark of the devil
 - the writer was later to use this experience of shame, isolation and alienation as the material for his first novel
 - joined the church of a black woman evangelist he happened to meet (1938) and served as a minister until 1941
 - moved to Greenwich Village (1944) where he began to shuffle off his church associations and work on a novel
 - most of his intimate relationships were **homosexual**, this at a time when homosexuality was still criminalized
 - moved to France (1948) for some time and spent the rest of his life travelling between Europe and America
- Writing**
- known principally as a novelist and essayist, was also a playwright, scriptwriter, poet, director and film-maker
 - his novels, essays and play *The Amen Corner* (1955) revolve around the themes of **racial and sexual identity**
 - explores the question of colour as a determinant of identity, adds the questions of sexuality, family and religion
 - observes that ‘the question of colour, especially in this country, operates to hide the great question of the self’
 - insists on ‘the necessity of Americans to achieve an identity’ by tackling the systematic racism and injustice
 - suggests in *The Fire Next Time* (1962) that America must solve racism or face apocalypse, ‘the fire next time’
- Semi-Autobiography**
- Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953)**
- provisionally titled ‘Crying Holy’ and then ‘In My Father’s House’, immediately established his reputation
 - may be seen as an **initiation** novel of the protagonist John Grimes who is introduced on his fourteenth birthday
 - records the initiation into knowledge of one’s own sexuality, racial identity, humanity and place in community
 - the protagonist is modelled on the author himself and also other characters resemble his actual family members
- Section I**
- ‘The Seventh Day’, the first section, is told from the protagonist’s perspective and sets his marginal position
 - the protagonist is denied by his stepfather and dismissed for his supposed unmanliness, ugliness and intellect
 - the **rejected son** dispossessed of his birthright embodies the historical experience of the African American
 - one way is to see himself as others see him, lapse into hatred of himself and succumb to shame, fear and guilt
 - another way is to struggle to accept and realize himself, to pursue self-realization on a larger historical scale
- Section II**
- ‘The Prayers of the Saints’, the second section, concentrates on the protagonist’s aunt, stepfather and mother
 - offers variations on the theme of self-denial, uses images of dirt, darkness, grime to evoke what is to be denied
 - all the three characters concerned choose to evade their true feelings and **hide** their true selves **behind masks**
 - links the story of individuals to history, shows through them the substance of the African American experience
- Section III**
- ‘The Treshing-Floor’, the final section, recounts the struggle of the protagonist for his own self, his own soul
 - the protagonist goes through a complex religious experience, from a sense of damnation to one of **salvation**
 - accepts the core of his being and also his community of other African Americans who have suffered as he has
 - expresses the acceptance through the sound of the blues and sound of all the rhythms of African American life
- Novels**
- Giovanni’s Room* (1956)**
- his second novel, openly explores homosexuality in the story of a young white American expatriate in Paris
- Another Country* (1962)**
- his third novel, uses various settings and several characters to explore the issues of racial and sexual identity
- Tell Me How Long the Train’s Been Gone* (1968), *If Beale Street Could Talk* (1974), *Just Above My Head* (1979)**
- later novels, similarly pursue problems of race and sexuality
- Essays**
- Notes of a Native Son* (1955), *Nobody Knows My Name: More Notes of a Native Son* (1961), *The Fire Next Time* (1962), *The Price of the Ticket* (1985)**
- collections of essays
- Plays**
- The Amen Corner* (1955)**
- a play dealing with racial and sexual identity and the influence of the church on the lives of African Americans
- Blues for Mr Charlie* (1964)**
- a play based on the killing of the black boy Emmett Till for whistling at a white woman in Mississippi (1955)
- One Day, When I was Lost* (1973), *A Deed from the King of Spain* (1974)**
- later plays

Langston Hughes (1902–1967)

- Biography**
- born in Missouri to parents of mixed African American, European American and Native American descent
 - raised mainly by his grandmother who introduced him to the oral tradition and instilled him with **racial pride**

Genres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> went through various jobs, was working as a busboy in Washington when Vachel Lindsay launched his career graduated from college and moved to Harlem, which became his primary home for the remainder of his life wrote poetry, fiction, plays, essays, biographies, histories, journalism, translations, also two autobiographies edited anthologies of African American writing, also produced librettos, film scripts, songs, children's books
Aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> committed to the notion of a separate and distinctive black identity, the shared presence of African Americans insists that it is the duty of young African American artists to uncover the power and glory of their traditions aims 'to change through the force of his art that old whispering "I want to be white"' present among his people declares as his aim 'to interpret and comment upon Negro life, and its relations to the problems of Democracy'
Subjects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> makes his favourite subject the ordinary black men and women of the fields and streets, especially of Harlem qualifies as a socially committed poet, clearly seeks identification and imaginative empathy with his characters speaks through a multiplicity of voices to capture the multiple layers, the pace, drive and variety, of black life dramatizes the petty oppressions of individual black people, their dreams of liberation or their stony endurance
Influences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> influenced by the free verse as employed by Carl Sandburg, Vachel Lindsay and above all Walt Whitman even more influenced by black music, tried to grasp and hold the meanings and rhythms of jazz⁷ in his poems includes into jazz also spirituals, work songs, field hollers and shouts, blues, gospel, ragtime and rock and roll uses the classic blues form⁸, mixes classic with other forms or uses fragments of blues themes and vocabulary adopts from jazz its 'conflicting changes, sudden nuances, sharp and impudent interjections, broken rhythms' suggests that the open-ended and improvisational nature of jazz subverts the closed structures of white culture
Poetry	<p><i>Montage of a Dream Deferred</i> (1951)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a poetry collection, one of his most impressive works which manages to create a verbal portrait of Harlem employs the free associations and abrupt rhythms of boogie-woogie, street poetry, rapping and jive-talk
Fiction	<p><i>Ask Your Mama</i> (1961)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a poetry collection including perhaps his most experimental and his first truly multicultural poems <p><i>Simple Speaks His Mind</i> (1950), <i>Simple Takes a Wife</i> (1953), <i>Simple Stakes a Claim</i> (1957), <i>Simple's Uncle Sam</i> (1965)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Simple Stories' were originally character vignettes for a journal to which he devoted the latter part of his life involve an apparently slow and even dull-witted black character who always manages to outwit his antagonists comment on topical issues through the eyes of the humorous and street-wise Harlem worker Jesse B. Simple <p><i>Laughing to Keep From Crying</i> (1952), <i>Something in Common</i> (1963)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> short story collections <p><i>Tambourines to Glory</i> (1958)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a novel
Auto-biographies	<p><i>The Big Sea</i> (1940), <i>I Wonder as I Wander</i> (1956)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> autobiographies

⁷ By 'jazz' Hughes nearly always meant black musical culture in general.

⁸ In music, the blues form is characteristic for the twelve-bar blues chord progressions. In poetry, the Blues Stanza is a three-line stanza rhymed AAa BBb etc. As to subject matter, blues typically uses ironic laughter mixed with tears.

(2) African American Woman Writers and Womanism

Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Gloria Naylor, Toni Cade Bambara, Paule Marshall

Womanism

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| Features | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an African-American form of feminism defined by Alice Walker in <i>In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens</i> (1987) • a black feminism that 'appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's flexibility and women's strength' • a form not narrowly exclusive but 'committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female' • the original definition of womanism appeared in the preface of Alice Walker's book and included four parts |
| Four-Part Definition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the term derives from the adjective 'womanish' as opposed to 'girlish', meaning acting grown up but in way that is wilful, courageous, audacious, even outrageous, but not in the negative sense • the womanists love other women, sexually or non-sexually, and struggle to free their people from oppression • the womanists love music, dance, the moon, the Spirit, love, food, roundness, struggle, the folk and themselves • the relation of womanism to feminism is similar as the relation of the colour purple to lavender |

Toni Morrison (b. 1931)

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| Writing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • emphasizes 'not the difference between fact and fiction but the distinction between fact and truth' because the latter cannot exist without human intelligence, whereas the former can exist independently from human beings • seeks 'to have the reader work <i>with</i> the writer in the construction of the book' and in her novels often uses a number of various narrative devices to implement that goal • brings forward those exiled to the margins for their race or gender to name themselves and narrate their history • emphasizes the centrality of the African American experience, in particular that of an African American female • focuses on the psychosocial consequences of racism, on the mind-forged manacles of internalized racism |
| History | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • her work can be seen as an attempt to write several concentric histories of the American experience from a distinctively African American perspective in order to move away from the dominant context of white history • focuses on 'silence and evasion', the shadows and absences, the gaps and omissions in American history • draws 'the overwhelming presence of black people in the United States' from the margins of the imagination to the centre of American literature and history • argues that what is distinctive about the history of the country is 'its claim to freedom' as well as 'the presence of the unfree within the heart of the democratic experiment' • claims that 'Africanism is inextricable from the definition of Americanness' from its origins until the present |

The Bluest Eye (1970)

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| Internalized Racism | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • her first novel, whose narrator, Claudia McTeer, tells the story of Pecola Breedlove, a little black girl whose overwhelming hunger for love is manifested in a desire for blue eyes which eventually drives her to insanity • deconstructs the image of the white community as the site of normality and perfection and exposes the realities of life in an impoverished African American community • opens with a parodic passage from a Dick and Jane school primer presenting an ideal, inevitably white family • Pecola is driven inward by the norms of white society to shame and the destruction and division of the self • Claudia is directed outward to anger against white society, focusing her anger on destroying her white dolls |
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Sula (1973)

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| Female Relationships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • her second novel shows how a black community evolves and shapes itself within its own cultural resources • opens up the area of intimate friendship between African American women through the two main characters • charts the diverse paths and possibilities available to females as part of or apart from communal tradition |
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Song of Solomon (1977)

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| Present Through Past | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • her third novel follows the growth of a distinctive black identity and community through the habit of language • tells the story of a young man, Milkman Dead, who comes to know himself through a return to his origins • consists of a complex tapestry of memory and myth in the slave legends surrounding the protagonist's family • teaches the protagonist through the stories of men who flew to freedom and women who remained to foster • takes the protagonist back to the history and makes him discover through the past how to live in the present |
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Assimilation v. Separation Tar Baby (1981)

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| Assimilation v. Separation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • further pursues the themes of ancestry and identity, primarily through the contrast between two characters • Jadine Childs, a model, has been brought up with the help of white patrons and assimilated into white culture • William Son Green, an outcast and wanderer, remains outside the white culture and in deliberate resistance • the characters are drawn to each other and try to rescue the other, from assimilation and separation respectively • their love affair is eventually aborted, and neither of them changes fundamentally, leaving the conclusion open |
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Loose
Trilogy***Beloved*** (1987)⁹

- her masterpiece so far takes as the core an actual story of the fugitive slave Margaret Garner, who killed her daughter and then tried to kill her other children and herself rather than be returned back to slavery (1856)
- describes the story of Sethe Suggs, who killed her young daughter, *Beloved*, when faced with the same threat
- discloses the characters struggling with a past that cannot yet must be remembered, cannot yet must be named
- pivots around the main contradiction of black history, the **need to remember** and tell and the **desire to forget**
- the mother and daughter relationship as presented both denies the institution of slavery and measures its power
- the novel mixes narrative genres, contains elements of realism, the Gothic and African American folklore, weaves its way between the vernacular and a charged lyricism, the material and the magical
- forces the reader to collaborate with the author, narrator and characters in the construction of meaning, making the whole aim of both the story and its protagonist **to name the unnameable**

Jazz (1992)

- inspired by funeral photographs in *The Harlem Book of the Dead* that the author edited, set in Harlem in 1920s
- tells about a young woman who, as she lies dying, refuses to identify her lover as the person who has shot her
- imitates the improvisational **jazz techniques** by presenting history as a process of constant telling and retelling
- employs a narrator who constantly revisits and revises events and frankly confesses her own fallibility

Paradise (1998)

- set in 1976, the bicentennial of American democracy, but circles as far back as to the mid-eighteenth century
- describes the intimate contact between two communities, one a black township, the other a refuge for woman
- presents as the pivotal act the shooting and apparent killing of the women at the refuge by men from the town
- closes with the unresolved puzzle of the marvellous disappearance of all the bodies and reappearance of some

Alice Walker (b. 1944)

Womanism

- her reputation rests on her novels, but has also written poetry, short stories, essays and children's books
- all her work in all genres is devoted to what she calls womanism in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1987)
- her fiction focuses on the evolution of female wholeness, the development of female identity and community
- her non-fiction celebrates her **connection with other African American women**, particularly woman writers
- helped to promote the work of African American women by co-founding the publishing outlet Wild Tree Press
- also edited a seminal selection of the prose of Zora Neale Hurston, *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing* (1979)

Non-fiction

In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens (1987)

- at once a memoir and a series of observations on African American women's culture, especially literature
- establishes a specifically womanist tradition helping to show the pivotal importance of works by black women
- sets up a series of role models from the silent and unheralded, as mothers whose gardens or hand-crafted quilts are their own way of art, to the writer who has been the 'queen bee' for the author, that is **Zora Neale Hurston**

Novels

The Third Life of Grange Copeland (1970)

- a realistic first novel describing three generations of a family marred by racial oppression and sexual violence
- a stark account of a repetitive cycle of abuse, wife beating and sexual exploitation in the history of the family

Church
& Mother***Meridian*** (1976)

- concentrates on the civil rights movement and fight for social change, but centres on the experience of women
- the eponymous protagonist lives in the North but returns to the South to help in a voter registration drive
- feels held back by her past, her mother and a church that is both her mother's church and her mother church
- feels guilt over abandoning her own child, betraying 'maternal history' and involving herself in politics

Whole
Woman

- fails to come to personal terms with her **mother** but succeeds in experiencing a symbolic rapprochement when she whispers to the figure of her mother she sees in a dream that she loves her but also begs her to let her go
- manages to come to terms with the **church**, because the church she encounters in the South is one transformed by the civil rights revolution which offers a new and promising form of personal and socio-political revolution
- finally comes back to her own history only in order to transcend it and successfully become a **whole woman**

Masterpiece

The Color Purple (1982)

- follows a purely secular salvation involving the discovery of identity and community by the protagonist Celie
- shows Celie as a victim of racial and sexual oppression, raped by her father and abused in a loveless marriage
- makes Celie learn how to grow into being and companionship through the example of three women mentors

Mentors

- her first mentor, Sofia, teaches her by her own example the lesson of **resistance** to white and male oppression

⁹ The last three novels form a loosely connected trilogy about 'various kinds of love', that is, respectively, the love of a mother for her child, romantic love and 'the love of God and love for fellow human beings'.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • her sister Nettie, a missionary working in Africa, discloses the proud inheritance of the ancient black cultural and spiritual tradition and links the story of racial oppression in America to a larger history of imperial conquest • her last mentor, the blues singer Shug Avery, offers the possibility of sexual pleasure and unpacks the specific cultural forms shared by African Americans, both the sensual promise of jazz and the tragic melancholy of blues • Shug asserts that everything is holy, worthy of respect and wonder, even the colour purple, even Celia herself
Letters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • relates the process of becoming herself with learning a language, Celie learns to act by learning how to say it • takes on the form of an epistolary novel which shows Celie developing a language as a medium of selfhood • moves from letters to 'God' to letters sent to Celie's sister and by implication to all her sisters, all the readers • the novel figures as the author's seminal work, her later novels develop its themes and revisit its characters
Later Novels	<p><i>The Temple of My Familiar</i> (1989)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explores a variety of subjects from a womanist perspective, features Shug Avery and Celie's granddaughter • resembles a collection of loosely related tales, a sermon, a stream of dreams and memoirs rather than a novel • connected by the belief that 'all daily stories are in fact ancient and ancient ones current', there is nothing new <p><i>Possessing the Secret of Joy</i> (1992)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develops the issue of female circumcision as a symptom of male cultural violence <p><i>By the Light of My Father's Smile</i> (1998)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explores the thin and permeable boundaries between different ethnic traditions and between life and death
	<p>Gloria Naylor (b. 1950)</p>
Novels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shares with Toni Morrison and William Faulkner an interest in the determining impact of setting as well as the intention of creating her own fictional map in her novels
Female Victims	<p><i>The Women of Brewster Place</i> (1982)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • her first novel is a series of interrelated tales of seven African American women in a dead-end street of a ghetto • the women suffer from insensitivity and violence at the hands of men from their own families and community
Virgil & Dante	<p><i>Linden Hills</i> (1985)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • her second novel, set in the 1980s in a middle-class community, traces the journey of a young African American poet accompanied by a fellow poet through an exclusive black neighbourhood in search for odd jobs • suggests a resemblance of the two characters to Virgil and Dante and of Linden Hills to the Dantean Inferno • creates a setting that seems to be inhabited by the lost souls of those who have sold out to the dream of success
Magical	<p><i>Mama Day</i> (1988)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • superimposes two Willow Springs, an island off the coast of South Carolina and Georgia, and New York City • allows the consciousness of the island to narrate some parts, dramatizes exchanges of the living and the dead • aims to analyse the nature of belief by inviting the reader to participate in that willing suspension of disbelief that magic, religion and fiction all share
Mythical	<p><i>Bailey's Cafe</i> (1992)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the novel is written in the form of a jazz suite, but also combines the grimly material and the strangely mythic • centres the action on the eponymous New York City restaurant and all-night café as a way station of lost souls
Male Aggressors	<p><i>The Men of Brewster Place</i> (1998)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • returns to the men whose violence and indifference made the lives of the women of her first novel miserable • continues to map out the mundane facts, the magical dreams and monstrous nightmares belonging to one place
	<p>Toni Cade Bambara (1939–1995)</p>
Work & Views	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a short-story writer, novelist and scriptwriter¹⁰, a noted civil rights activist during the 1960s • writes in close alignment with her political convictions, calls herself 'Pan-Africanist-socialist-feminist' • realizes that African American women suffer from the double jeopardy of racism and sexism • suggests as a remedy for African American women to start 'turning toward each other' • turned to her own ancestors and added her grandmother's name, Bambara, to her own
Editions	<p><i>The Black Woman</i> (1970), <i>Tales and Stories for Black Folks</i> (1971)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • seminal anthologies of short stories and essays which she edited
Stories	<p><i>Gorilla, My Love</i> (1972), <i>The Sea Birds Are Still Alive</i> (1977)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • collections of short stories about a young African American woman who is trying to survive in the city

¹⁰ Among others author of the screenplay for the film based on Toni Morrison's novel *Tar Baby* (1981).

- distinguished by the acuteness of their socio-cultural observations and their energetically colloquial idioms
- the protagonist's **sassy straight talk** expresses 'a certain way of being in the world'
- the words catch the rhythms of African American folk speech and the 'games, chants, jingles' of the streets
- the language speaks the protagonist's resistance, affirmation of herself and her relation to other black women

Novels

The Salt Eaters (1980)

- a novel reflecting the profound changes of mood in the United States after the Vietnam War

Those Bones Are Not My Child (1999)

- a novel about the disappearance and murder of forty black children in Atlanta, Georgia, within three years
- edited by **Toni Morrison**, who regarded it as the author's masterpiece, and published posthumously

Paule Marshall¹¹ (b. 1929)

Barbados

- born in Brooklyn as the daughter of second-generation immigrants from Barbados, a West Indian island-nation
- grew up with the tales of her mother and her female **Barbadian** friends called by her the 'poets in the kitchen'
- approaches the experiences of black women from a different perspective due to her West Indian background

Fiction
Firsts***Brown Girl, Brownstones*** (1959)

- her first novel features as the protagonist Selina Boyce, the daughter of first-generation Barbadian immigrants
- one of the first novels since Claude McKay to explore the link between African Americans and West Indians
- one of the first to explore the inner life of a young black girl and the black **mother and daughter** relationship
- set in the brownstone buildings of **Brooklyn** in 1939 when white dwellers are being replaced by West Indians

Diaspora

- shows the protagonist torn between the kitchen talk of her mother and her friends and the reveries of her father
- her mother, a powerful overwhelming figure, longs to assimilate, buy house and buy into the American dream
- her father, a feckless romantic whom she adores, dreams of returning to Barbados in his upstairs sun room
- the protagonist struggles with her equivocal feelings about her mother and father and her polyglot inheritance
- decides to leave for Barbados, not to imitate her father's dream but to retrace her mother's diasporic wandering
- accepts the burden of finding all the cultural fragments needed for her American and Barbadian self-definition

Novellas

Soul Clap Hands and Sing (1961)

- a collection of four novellas, further developing the idea of the wandering quest undertaken in her first novel

Later
Novels***The Chosen Place, the Timeless People*** (1969), ***Praisesong for the Widow*** (1987), ***Daughters*** (1991)

- her later novels, dramatizing a search for and reconciliation of the self with an African diasporic historical past, often involving a **reverse Middle Passage**

¹¹ Not to be confused with Paula Marshall, an American actress.

(3) American Drama After the Second World War

Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams

American Drama until 1945

- in the nineteenth century drama was acted by touring **theatre troupes**, who performed mostly for cowboys and gold-diggers, often Shakespeare's plays so as to avoid paying royalties to the dead author
- until the twentieth century most plays produced were by European authors, the emphasis was on melodrama, spectacle and breath-taking performances on the part of the actors, who were celebrities of the pre-cinema era
- in the early twentieth century rather low-quality plays were performed in order to satisfy the popular taste and earn money in the face of the growing strong competition of films¹² and musicals
- the **Modernist Theatre** was dominated by **Eugene O'Neill**, who brought the stone theatre to the United States, set up two theatre groups and founded theatre guilds to ensure equal rights for everyone involved with theatre
- the **Expressionist Theatre** was dominated by **Elmer Rice**, whose play *The Adding Machine* (1923) is an example of expressionist drama preferring emotions and feelings rather than a detailed portrayal of reality
- the **Proletarian Theatre** was practised by **Clifford Odets**, whose best known play is *Waiting for Lefty* (1935)
- the Little Theatre Movement started in 1912 to encourage experimental theatre groups outside Broadway and to react against the popular taste of large audience and commercial theatre by supporting high-quality plays

American Theatre from 1945 to 1960

- New York City was the theatrical capital of America, Broadway was synonymous with the American theatre
- the fifteen years following the Second World War represented arguably the high point of the Broadway Theatre
- Broadway then featured the late plays of Eugene O'Neill and introduced Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams
- the **Method school** of acting was introduced and developed, consisting in the effort of actors to deliver lifelike performances by creating in themselves the thoughts and emotions of their characters rather than simulating them through external means, like vocal intonation or facial expression
- the plays were rooted in **domestic realism**, emphasizing the exploration of the subtext and the potential of the emotional drama lurking beneath the seemingly mundane situations and talk
- the most favourite and successful plays were on the themes of the **American Dream** and the **American Loss**
- the European theatre preferred individual characters, while the American theatre strived to create cultural types
- **Jim Crow**, or, Uncle Tom: an old Negro, loyal to masters whom he seeks to educate rather than revolt against, introduced in the song and dance 'Jump Jim Crow' (1928) by the playwright Thomas Dartmouth 'Daddy' Rice
- **Schlemiel** and **Schlimazel**: two Jewish loser types, the former inept and clumsy, the latter chronically unlucky, portrayed in Montague Glass's comedy called *Potash and Perlmutter* (1913) for common Jewish surnames
- **Ah Sin**: a Chinese gambler who manages to cheat even white opponents, established as a type in the joint play by Bret Harte and Mark Twain called *Ah Sin* (1877)

Broadway Theatre

- refers to theatrical performances staged in one of the forty professional theatres located in the Theatre District in Manhattan, New York City, seating five hundred spectators or more and appealing to the mass audiences
- represents an important aspect of the twentieth century American cultural history, featured besides playwrights the most influential classical music composers, including George Gershwin, Kurt Weill or Leonard Bernstein¹³
- ranks as the highest professional form of theatre in the English-speaking world, along with London's West End
- traces its origins to the nineteenth-century American dramatic forms of vaudeville and burlesque in interaction with the European grand opera, operetta and realistic drama
- **vaudeville**: a multi-act theatre performance presenting in a single evening acts of music, comedy, opera, feats of aestheticism, magic, animal acts, Shakespeare, banjo, acrobatics, gymnastics, lectures by celebrities etc.
- **burlesque**, also pastiche, parody, or mock-heroic: an imitative genre deriving its humour from an incongruous contrast between style and subject
- **Off-Broadway**: seats between 100 and 499 spectators, offers generally less expensive, less publicized and less famous performances, often experimental, challenging and rather non-profit
- **Off-Off-Broadway**: established as a reaction to Off-Broadway in the early 1960s, seats 100 or less spectators, offers non-professional and highly experimental performances

¹² The first feature-length sound film was *The Jazz Singer*, a musical film released in 1927.

¹³ Gershwin is famous for his *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924), Bernstein for his accompaniment for the musical *West Side Story* (1957).

Arthur Miller (1915–2005)

Writing

- uses realism to explore moral and political issues, focuses on **ordinary man under extraordinary pressure**
- stretches out realism to incorporate borrowings from symbolism and expressionism, like Tennessee Williams
- concentrates on the subject of the pursuit of success and public approbation enshrined in the American dream
- focuses on the social and familial tension, conflict of competing moralities and passionate misconceptions that the characters have to endure and points at the **economic and political system** as a final cause of their problems
- confronts his characters with the challenge to know and name themselves, a challenge that is both personal and rooted in a social landscape, and shows choices of his characters as determined by their history and their society
- shifts from the social to the personal in his later plays (since 1960s), focuses on individual experience and guilt

Competing Imperatives

All My Sons (1947)

- explores the past and its impact on the present and the moral and social responsibility through a family conflict
- the protagonist Joe Keller sells faulty airplane parts to the government during the war to support his family and does not realize his responsibility for the consequent death of several pilots until his son kills himself in shame
- the fictional centre is the question of whether the surviving son should marry the fiancée of his dead brother
- the blame is put on a system that forces one to choose between competing imperatives of **family and society**

Masterpiece

Death of a Salesman (1949)

- uses expressionism and symbolism to transmute domestic realism and a story of a common man into a tragedy
- employs realistic vernacular, the idiom of a society pursuing illusions and dreams rather than facts and reality
- presents the destructive side of the American dream through a representative ordinary man called Willy Loman
- the protagonist, a thirty-five-year old salesman, failed to achieve the rewards and recognition he hoped for and is driven to despair by his apparent failure in a system that seems to him to guarantee **success as a birthright**
- he withdraws into memories of the past and into imaginary conversations with his brother, a symbol of success

American Loss

- Willy believes that in the land of opportunity failure can only be the fault on the individual, is 'haunted by the hollowness of all he had placed his faith in' but still stakes 'his very life on the ultimate assertion' of that faith
- one of his sons, Happy, accepts the same 'only dream you can have' and plans to win it on behalf of his father
- his other son, Biff, senses that he does not want what the world calls success, but cannot articulate his feelings
- Willy learns the value of love through Biff but translates it into the values of a salesman, the only values that he knows, and kills himself so that his family can have the insurance money and Biff can get a new start in life

The Crucible (1953)

McCarthyism

- explores issues of personal conscience and social suppression in an analogy to the 1692 Salem witchcraft trials
- touches on the consequences of McCarthyism whipped up by the House Un-American Activities Committee¹⁴
- depicts the exploitation of cultural fears, conspiracy theories and social hysteria, the oppression of the innocent and manipulation of power, the complicity of ordinary citizens and public officials in a **paranoid social process**

Preserving Personal Integrity

- features an exemplary citizen, John Proctor, whose illegitimate lover Abigail names his wife Elizabeth a witch
- the husband attempts to expose the accuser and confesses to adultery, but both he and his wife are arrested
- Proctor is drawn into examining his life, experiences an intense spiritual revaluation of himself and realizes that honour requires his death because though innocent of witchcraft, he has other responsibilities to answer for
- Proctor confesses to witchcraft for he believes that his dying with the truly innocent would be unearned, but recants out of a sense of responsibility to the innocents that he is to die with and to himself, and chooses death
- Proctor is executed but manages to preserve his core of being, his sense of his worth, or his name, as he puts it

Losing Personal Integrity

A View from the Bridge (1955, revised 1956)

- follows a Sicilian American longshoreman, Eddie Carbone, who is consumed with a nearly incestuous love for his niece and is driven to report on a cousin smuggled into the country when the niece falls in love with the man
- violates one of the taboos of his culture by reporting the illegal immigrant to the authorities but denies his guilt and equating the loss of honour with loss of name, he tries to recover his self-respect by seizing it by violence

Marilyn Monroe

After the Fall (1964)

- a semi-autobiographical play based on the author's marriage to Marilyn Monroe, his second wife out of three
- Quentin prepares for his third marriage with the fear that his past does not make him **deserving of happiness**
- the central character realizes that the defects for which he blames himself are part of the human condition, as human beings we must accept and forgive our imperfections and build our future on the basis of that acceptance

¹⁴ McCarthyism refers to the Second Red Scare in the 1950s, named for the Republican Senator Joseph McCarthy who fuelled the fears of widespread Communists subversion. House Un-American Activities Committee (1938–1975) was founded to detect Nazi propaganda but was later focused on persecuting those suspected from Communist sympathies. The suspects were often Jewish intellectuals, artists and disillusioned former communists, among them Arthur Miller, Richard Wright and Lillian Hellman.

Later
Plays***Incident at Vichy*** (1964)

- a play dealing with the Nazi persecution of the Jews set during the Vichy government in France (1940–1944)

The Price (1968)

- a play dealing with two brothers who meet after the death of their father to arrange the sale of his furniture

The Creation of the World and Other Business (1972)

- a serio-comic rewriting of the story of Adam and Eve, in which Adam must struggle to find a capacity for goodness and moral responsibility in himself to guide Eve towards forgiveness and Cain towards repentance

Tennessee Williams (1911–1983)

Trivia

- born Thomas Lanier Williams, changed his name (1939) to Tennessee, referring to the state of his father's birth
- his granduncle was **Sidney Lanier** (1842–1881), a nature poet, considered the only true follower of E. A. Poe
- born in Mississippi, lived in several places mostly in the South, for example in St. Louis and in New Orleans
- his **problematic family** was to inspire much of his writing, his mother was a borderline hysteric, his father a heavy drinker, his much beloved sister was diagnosed with schizophrenia and consequently institutionalized
- one of the first famous Southerners to reveal openly his homosexuality, second perhaps only to Truman Capote
- his later years were marked by alcoholism, drugs and depressive illness, especially after the death of his lover
- his later plays are weaker, he rewrote material, *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* (1963) three times

Writing

- claimed that he wrote from his own tensions, as a form of therapy, which produced a series of intensely poetic explorations of the injured spirit, the private pains and passions of lonely individuals who **hardly endure living**
- preoccupied with fragile and deeply wounded characters concerned with nameless fears and insecurities and with desperate desires which make them grasp at anything to numb them and to offer distraction from their pain
- uses realism to explore emotional and psychological forces, focuses on **extraordinary people** trying to bear up against the ordinary pressures of life and on the common humanity that connects the outsider to the rest of us
- his best work is marked by an intensely heightened realism and a **poetic impressionism** of feeling and method, which make the ordinary seem extraordinary, the domestic mythic and the mundane a sensual mystery
- his favourite theme is waiting for meaning and for emotional rescue, as quoted in *Orpheus Descending* (1957)

The Glass Menagerie (1945)Family
Memories

- a memory play that stretches ordinary domestic realism to explore extremes of sensibility and experience and transforms the domestic setting of the play by filtering it through reminiscence of the narrator Tom Wingfield
- deploys evocative language, elusive symbolism and suggestive glimpses into ephemeral thought and emotion
- circulates around Tom's **memories of his family** living in genteel poverty in St. Louis, Missouri, during the Depression, his former ache to leave home and his present guilt over his actual desertion of his mother and sister
- recalls Tom's mother Amanda, a faded Southern belle who clings to glamorous illusions about her past, and his sister Laura, a shy crippled young woman whose private world is centred on a collection of small glass animals

Emotional
Truth

- the mother insisted on Tom's supplying a man to care for Laura in his absence, Tom brought a visitor, 'an emissary from a world that we were somehow set apart from', the visit turned a disaster, and Tom left the family
- the Wingfield family is presented as **unable to function in reality**, though this seems more of a virtue than a weakness, for the alternative space they inhabit appears as special and seductive as the world of Laura's animals
- the narrator is led to realize that though he tried to leave his family behind, he is more faithful to them than he intended, he is doomed to relive the past and to recognize that it is in the past that the emotional truth resides

A Streetcar Named Desire (1947)Desire &
Cemetery

- his finest play, set in New Orleans, Louisiana, was inspired by the author's stay in this city where there were 'two streetcars, one named Desire and the other named Cemetery' running near the place where the author lived
- the 'undiscourageable progress' of the two symbolically expresses the opposing fundamentals of experience
- Blanche Dubois, a fading Southern belle, visits her sister Stella to find her married to a crude 'animal', the intensely physical Stanley Kowalski, and struggles for control of Stella with Stanley and for a new life and love
- Blanche is torn between death and its opposite desire, the desperate longing to live and to love, perhaps, which drives her into a wrenching conflict, a mortal combat with Stanley for somewhere to be, for a place for herself
- Blanche fails, her romance with Stanley's friend Mitch is over, and after a violent and sexual confrontation with Stanley she is defeated and broken and is taken off to the asylum while Stella and Stanley remain together

Conflicting
Opposites

- the play has the elemental force of a **struggle for survival**, beginning as Blanche invades the space occupied by Stanley and Stella, continuing in a fight for it between Blanche and Stanley, and ending in Blanche's defeat
- weaves a complex tapestry of oppositions in describing the conflicting and contesting personalities of Blanche and Stanley, presents the two antagonists as strangely fascinated with each other and with their antagonism

- **Blanche** is a Southern lady in a world that has no use for ladies, is associated with whiteness and the virgin of the zodiac, stands for **idealism**, culture, purity, love and romance, but also for falsehood, fantasy and weakness
- **Stanley** is associated with vivid colours, violent action, the goat of the zodiac and the strutting cockerel of folktale, represents **prosaic reality** rather than poetic idealism and the rawly physical rather than the spiritual
- the play may be seen as a fairytale of beauty and the beast, as a social history of a declining old world and an emergent new one or as a mythic contest between the material and the moral, the female principle and the male

***Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955)**

- a powerful play with a dual narrative, focusing on a Mississippi landowner, Big Daddy Pollitt, and his family
- Pollitt has to decide who should inherit his estate, practical considerations favour his sensible and reliable son Gooper, while emotion and empathy draw him towards his childless and tortured son Brick and his wife Maggie
- Brick and Maggie, the cat of the title, have to find a way of living together and face the facts about themselves
- both narratives gravitate towards the discovery of **emotional truth**, the need to know as well as accept oneself
- Pollitt eventually decides in favour of Brick, his natural heir and spiritual mirror, while Brick and Maggie start to face the facts about their relationship, which are far from being pleasant but offer the chance of real survival

***Orpheus Descending* (1957)**

- the main character, Val Xavier, declares that we are all sentenced to solitary confinement inside our skins, that we are all waiting and living in the meantime, waiting for something to happen to make things make more sense

***Suddenly Last Summer* (1958)**

- a weaker play, deviates into a sensationalism unanchored in the emotional reality and the raw, intimate feeling

***The Night of the Iguana* (1961)**

- a play with a minimal plot, among the better of his later work, again weaving together very different characters

***The Rose Tattoo* (1951), *Period of Adjustment* (1960)**

- among his weaker plays, minor comedies, though the first mentioned won him a Tony Award for best play

***Camino Real*¹⁵ (1953), *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1959), *Summer and Smoke* (1968)**

- among the weaker of his plays, marred by an excess of symbolism, an overplus of heavily signposted meaning

***The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* (1963)**

- again a weaker play, though including an extraordinary speech in which the speaker compares human beings to 'kittens or puppies', 'secure in the house of their master' at daytime but not so much at night when they sleep

***In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel* (1969)**

- a play apparently used as a confessional, featuring an artist who suffers a mental and aesthetic breakdown

***Clothes for a Summer Hotel* (1980)**

- another play as a confessional, using F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald as projections of his own sense of falling off

Dual
Narrative

Later
Plays

¹⁵ The title is Spanish for the 'Royal Road', referring to the long trails that used to link the various colonies of Spain in the Americas.

(4) Theatre of the Absurd and Model Drama

Edward Albee, Arthur Kopit, Leroi Jones

American Drama in the 1960s

New
Theatres

Experi-
ments

- in the 1960s the dominance of Broadway was being challenged, alternative theatre was appearing in New York
- Off-Broadway was the first to appear, Off-Off-Broadway followed when the former acquired respectability
- new theatres developed in other parts of the country, new forms of organization and financing were introduced, for instance theatres as non-profit corporations, support from private foundations, repertory companies etc.
- the expanded theatrical area encouraged a degree of **experiment**, new companies challenged domestic realism
- new dramatists moved away from a drama that was author- and text-based and turned to improvisation instead, using a text only as a departure point, to mime, dance and ritual, to a theatre of constant change and process
- the radical technique of **transformation** was introduced, in which actors suddenly switch roles or even plays
- American playwrights never surrendered their allegiance to domestic realism but were encouraged to expand it, embellish it and push it to new frontiers, among others due to the influence of the 1960s theatrical experiment

The Theatre of the Absurd

Criteria

Represent-
atives

- the term 'absurd' was originally used to refer to something out of harmony, in the meaning of disharmonious
- the two main criteria of absurd playwrights are characters that do **not develop** and structure that is **circular**
- the themes of absurd plays are communication difficulties, exhaustion of language, existential questions etc.
- absurd drama does not aspire to create a realistic situation but the situation presented may be a realistic one
- each absurd drama is at the same time a model drama in that it always follows the given frame or structure
- the literary-critical term was coined by the British critic **Martin Esslin** (1918–2002) in his book *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1961) to characterize the work of certain key playwrights mostly produced in the 1950s to 1960s
- the key achievement of the theatre of the absurd was *Waiting for Godot* (1953) by the Irish author **Samuel Beckett** (1906–1989), in which two exemplary derelicts wait helplessly for a salvation unlikely to materialize
- plays emphasizing the irrationality of the world and the illogic of human behaviour, often in a harshly comic tone, came from the Romanian-French writer **Eugene Ionesco** (1909–1994), author of *The Bald Soprano* (1950)
- **Harold Pinter's** (1930–2008) *The Birthday Party* (1957) and *The Dumb Waiter* (1959) represent British plays
- among American absurd playwrights are **Edward Albee** (b. 1928), **Arthur Kopit** (b. 1937) or **Jack Gelber** (1932–2003), author of *The Connection* (1952), a play on the shapeless and random existence of heroin addicts

The Absurd in Philosophy

Camus's
Sisyphus

- inspired by an essay by the French philosopher **Albert Camus** (1913–1960) called *The Myth of Sisyphus*¹⁶ (1942) which in its four chapters suggests that man is a stranger in an irrational universe, deprived of 'illusions and light', bereft of purpose, and hence subjected to a metaphysical and moral anguish, or 'feeling of Absurdity'
- Chapter 1, **An Absurd Reasoning**: the fact of human mortality renders all our hopes as absurd, our passion to understand the world cannot be satisfied; our task then is to acknowledge the absurd condition, to recognize the contradiction between the desire of human reason and the unreasonable world, to revolt and then enjoy freedom
- Chapter 2, **The Absurd Man**: ethical rules do not apply to the absurd man because there is no higher purpose; instances of the absurd man are Don Juan, who lives the passionate life to the fullest, the actor, who depicts ephemeral lives for ephemeral fame, or the conqueror, whose actions engage him fully in human history
- Chapter 3, **Absurd Creation**: absurd art is restricted to a description of the myriad experiences in the world because its explanation is not possible; absurd art refrains from judging and alluding to any shadow of hope
- Chapter 4, **The Myth of Sisyphus**: Sisyphus represents the absurd man who lives his life to the fullest because he is conscious of his absurd condition, surmounts it by scorn and reaches a state of contented acceptance; our modern lives and futile jobs are as pointless as Sisyphus's toil, and one must imagine Sisyphus happy

The Absurd in Aesthetics

Aesthetic
Categories

- there are two aesthetic categories, the comic and the tragic, and several subcategories mixing elements of both
- **humour**: a subcategory of the comic which contains elements of the comic only, with no elements of the tragic
- **black humour** or gallows humour: a subcategory of the comic which contains mostly comic elements but also some tragic elements; typically uses the genres of a farce, a grotesque, a slapstick comedy or a black comedy

¹⁶ Sisyphus is a figure of Greek mythology who defied the gods by trying to cheat death and was condemned to repeat for all eternity the meaningless task of pushing a boulder up a mountain only to see it roll down again and have to start over.

- **the bizarre**: a subcategory which contains still more tragic elements but comic elements clearly prevail
- **the grotesque**: contains even more tragic elements than the bizarre but the comic elements still prevail
- **the absurd**: a subcategory which is considered to contain 51% comic elements and 49% tragic elements; the absurd is based on the imbalance created by the considerable proportion of tragic elements in a comic mode
- **the macabre**: a counterpart of the absurd in that it contains 49% comic elements and 51% tragic elements

Edward Albee (b. 1928)

Themes

- the most notable of the many dramatists who discovered the freedom first to experiment outside of Broadway
- his obsessive themes include alienation, the human **need for and terror of contact**, nameless existential fears
- preoccupied with loss, **failed relationships**, decayed sexuality, broken families and emotionally scarred people
- explores the intertextual realm of our reality as well as the consonance between individual and national decline

Language

- committed to the rhythms of the language, fascinated with linguistic precision, compact metaphor and symbol
- reached his greatest success in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962), his later plays lack the verve and bitter vitality, tend to be too abstracted and intent on presenting an intellectual argument rather than a dramatic action
- suffered from a growing sense that **language was hollowed out** by history of betrayal, evacuated of humanity

Anxiety
for Contact

The Zoo Story (1959)

- his first, one-act play, produced in Berlin, a year later in New York, introduced many of his recurrent themes
- an extended monologue of a young New Yorker so lost and alienated that he feels any contact would be a relief
- the protagonist lights on an ordinary man in the park and attempts a contact, however painful or impermanent
- he fails to move the man by telling him his story, so he starts a knife fight, impales himself on the blade of his opponent and dies giving thanks for the proof of himself and his ability to impinge on another he has received
- the title refers to the experience of the young man who has been to the zoo where he discovered in the caged animals an expression of the **human isolation** he had experienced and the **animal vitality** drained out of society

An Old
Woman

The Sandbox (1959)

- a one-act play following the dying of an old woman, a brief mourning and a burial in a sandbox by her family

Alienation
& Racism

The Death of Bessie Smith¹⁷ (1961)

- based on the actual personality who died from injuries sustained in a road accident, perhaps due to negligence
- argues that if she had been white, she would have received earlier medical treatment that could have saved her
- suggests that the rage and resentment provoked by anxiety and alienation find the illusion of release in racism

Absence
of Feeling

The American Dream (1961)

- combines some absurdist dramatic strategies with a devastating analysis of national values implied by the title
- features a typical American family including an emasculated Daddy, abrasive Mommy and cynical Grandma
- presents the characters as empty and **evacuated of feeling** by the American dream of success, their abuse of life and disconnection from real human emotion are reflected in and expressed by the comical abuse of language
- concludes with the appearance of an equally anonymous Young Man, in whom the family finds their natural heir, as he confesses that since one traumatic moment in his past he no longer has the capacity to feel anything

Master-
piece

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (1962)

- his best and his first full-length play, the first to start on Broadway due to the success of *The American Dream*
- unlike his earlier work moves towards domestic realism, but a **domestic realism** edged with a **fiery poeticism**
- set in a small New England college, depicts the events of one single night of passionate conflict and purgation
- like Tennessee Williams shows characters who find everyday life emotionally exhausting, almost unendurable
- George, a history professor, and his wife Martha invite their young colleague Nick and his nervous wife Honey for a visit to their home and involve them in a torrent of argument and abuse that appears to be a nightly ritual

Existential
Loneliness

- 'Fun and Games' become pain and purgation pushed to the limit in 'Walpurgisnacht' and treated in 'Exorcism'
- Martha and George have created an imaginary son as some kind of sustenance and defence against the **existential dread** that haunts their lives and by declaring him dead at the end they acknowledge their illusions
- the couple ends the play facing future with a courage that comes from admitting their fear but not turning back
- their **immersion in life** is ultimately seen as strangely heroic, life seems to be real when it resists and hurts, life is presented as painful and unbearably difficult for those passionately devoted to living rather than evading
- the title question may be put as who is afraid of the despair and insecurity of modern life, especially modern American life, and answered that George and Martha are, but so is everybody, and the two at least know about it

Faith &
Illusion

Tiny Alice (1964)

- explores the absurd but inescapable nature of faith and illusion in a discussion between a lawyer and a cardinal

¹⁷ Bessie Smith (1898–1937), an African American, one of the greatest and most popular blues vocalists of the 1920s and 1930s.

Human Defence	<p><i>A Delicate Balance</i> (1966)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a Pulitzer Prize winner, dramatizes the human defence systems, how social and family rituals, even argument and aberrant behaviour, act as temporary stays against confusion, a way of shoring up the psyche against dread
Relationships	<p><i>Box</i> (1968), <i>Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung</i> (1968)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dwell on the banality of human relationships in America, peer beyond the moment of nuclear annihilation into a world in which an off-stage voice comments on an empty stage as a failure of art and of human commitment
Couples	<p><i>Seascape</i> (1974)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a Pulitzer Prize winner, like his masterpiece focuses on the failure of communication between two couples
Writing	<p>Arthur Kopit (b. 1937)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • born in New York, educated at Harvard where he wrote and directed several plays, culminating with <i>Oh Dad...</i> • influenced by the European theatre, especially by the French farce, decadent genres, but also by Bertolt Brecht • praised for his ease with language, his impressive theatricality and his skewering of American popular culture • shows a considerable versatility in a variety of theatrical idioms, began with humour and shifted to the absurd • besides original plays wrote also the book for a musical play <i>Nine</i> (1982), based on Federico Fellini's film <i>8½</i>
Tragifarce	<p><i>Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad</i> (1960)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a student play, written in the idiom of European theatre of the absurd, both imitation and parody of the mode • subtitled 'a pseudoclassical tragifarce in a bastard French tradition', styled in a wildly farcical fantastic way • parodies the avant-garde theatre in form and the Oedipus complex in the subject of the dominant mother figure • the absurdist title is matched by the absurdist action of the play in which the fabulously wealthy mamma of the title travels the world taking with her the dead body of her husband, a talking fish and two giant Venus fly-traps • the mamma is accompanied by a son whom she insists on calling by whatever name first comes to her mind • treats the 'silver cord' theme, the connection between the physical body, astral or etheric body and higher self • the serious point is the eccentric strategies people use to protect themselves from a hostile and terrifying world
One-Act Plays	<p><i>The Day the Whores Came Out To Play Tennis</i> (1964)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a one-act play about social climbers at a tennis club whose members are outraged by an invasion of prostitutes <p><i>Sing to Me Through Open Windows</i> (1965)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a one-act play about a magician and his clown-butler living in isolation with the boy unpacking his memories <p><i>Chamber Music</i> (1965)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a one-act play, set in a mental home in 1938, where eight famous women from different historical periods meet • the characters include Gertrude Stein, Joan of Arc, activist Susan B. Anthony, politician Queen Isabella of Spain, Mozart's wife Constanze, pilot Amelia Earhart, silent-film actress Pearl White and explorer Osa Johnson • the women come together to prepare themselves for an attack that they expect to come from the men's ward
American Imperialism	<p><i>Indians</i> (1968)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fuses the narratives of erasure of the Indian tribes from their ancestral homes with US involvement in Vietnam • uses the bizarrely symbolic figures of Sitting Bull¹⁸ and Buffalo Bill Cody¹⁹ and his travelling Wild West show • follows Sitting Bull and his people who are forced to live and starve on a reservation and Buffalo Bill who tries to keep peace when Sitting Bull is promised to meet the President and a group of senators arrives instead • explores American mythmaking and the way the nation has suppressed knowledge of its past, including white American imperialism, by transforming the actual into the apocryphal and moral guilt into mythical innocence
Later Plays	<p><i>Wings</i> (1978)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a poetic drama, produced on the air a year before the stage date, follows a former aviatrix recovering from a comatose state after suffering a stroke, presenting her fractured world by the means of her interior monologue <p><i>Good Help Is Hard To Find</i> (1981)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a one-act play about a servant helping out an elderly couple who eventually turns out to be an 'Angel of Death' <p><i>End of the World with Symposium to Follow</i> (1984)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a parody about the nuclear arms race showing the end of the human world as being threatened by a nuclear war <p><i>Road to Nirvana</i> (1991)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a racy satirical comedy on Hollywood, exposing the vice-saturated and ego-driven underbelly of the film industry in following a failed film producer who is trying to get out of dope dealing and back to film making

¹⁸ Sitting Bull (c. 1831–1890), a Hunkpapa Lakota Sioux war chief, famous for his winning the Battle of the Little Big Horn (1876).

¹⁹ 'Buffalo Bill' (1846–1917), a white American buffalo hunter and showman, famous for his Old West shows with cowboy themes.

***Because He Can* (2000)**

- a mystery play originally produced under the title *Y2K*, following the couple of a professor and his wife who are interrogated by the FBI and who have skeletons in their closets that they would rather not have revealed

Leroi Jones – Imamu Amiri Baraka²⁰ (b. 1934)

- Black Arts**
- called the father of the Black Arts movement, preached that ‘the black man is the future of the world’ and radically insisted that ‘the black artist’s role in America is to aid in the destruction of America as he knows it’
 - appropriated the mythic power that Western symbolism habitually imputes to blackness, aimed to turn those symbols inside out, so as to make them a source of pride for blacks and a source of fear and wonder for whites
 - encouraged a generation to be unapologetic, even proud and aggressive, about their African American heritage
 - introduced a **prophetic** and **apocalyptic** tone, a sense of a violent and **revolutionary redemption** of past sins
 - hoped that creation would follow the ritual destruction, that primal innocence and perfection would be restored
 - in the 1960s dispensed with his white ‘slave name’ of Leroi Jones and adopted a title more in keeping with his new self and mission, his work became more radical and preoccupied with issues of racial and national identity
- Repertory Theatre**
- opened the **Black Arts Repertory Theatre** in Harlem (1965) a major contribution to the development of black arts, on its demise set up the Spirit House in Newark, New Jersey, with a troupe called the **Spirit House Movers**
 - produced over a dozen of **one-act ‘shock’ plays** with elements of the **ritual theatre** and theatre of the absurd
 - his earlier plays focus on the issues of personal identity, his later deal with relations between blacks and whites and show the author’s awareness of himself being the leader of the revolutionary theatre fighting against racism
 - in the mid-1970s turned to a Marxist-Leninist perspective, anticipating the fall of oppressive capitalist systems
- One-Act Plays**
- A Good Girl is Hard to Find* (1958)**
- his first published work, a minor play, alluding to Flannery O’Connor’s story ‘A Good Man is Hard to Find’
- The Baptism* (1964)**
- a one-act play about the hypocritical black church in which a homosexual is the only to admit his perversion
- The Toilet* (1964)**
- a one-act play showing a tapestry of festering bigotry coming to boil in a high school toilet when bullies attack
- Master-piece**
- Dutchman* (1964)**
- a one-act play following a violent verbal confrontation between a twenty-year old black bourgeois intellectual and a thirty-year old white woman in an underground train, ending up with the woman stabbing the young man
 - expresses the usually suppressed anger and hostility of African Americans towards the dominant white culture
- Later Plays**
- The Slave* (1964)**
- a two-act play about a black revolutionary seeking vengeance on his former white wife and her new husband
- Slave Ship: A Historical Pageant* (1967)**
- a dramatic pageant with music, dance, elaborate costumes and mass scenes, that depicts the horrors of slavery
- Marxist Plays**
- Four Black Revolutionary Plays* (1969)**
- the plays included in the book show the author reaching out to and trying to teach a largely unlettered audience
- S-1* (1974), *The Motion of History* (1977)**
- the plays demonstrate the shift of his political ideology and aesthetics with a formal commitment to Marxism
 - the former is a call for blacks and white to unite and fight, the latter is a history of racial and social injustice

²⁰ Leroi accepted this name following the assassination of Malcolm X (1965). ‘Imamu’ refers to ‘imam’, a Muslim spiritual leader.

(5) Contemporary American Drama

Arthur Miller, Edward Albee, Woody Allen, David Mamet, Tony Kushner

Contemporary American Drama

Character-istics

- American theatre today is characterized as realistic, **contemporary**, middle-class, **domestic** and melodramatic
- most plays deal with real people in real situations, with present-day problems, social, political, moral or others
- the characters are ordinary people living ordinary lives, the settings are familiar places as houses, offices, bars
- the focus is on plays **easily accessible** and easy to be understood, high drama (as Shakespeare) is not preferred

Musical

American Musical

- Broadway produced the musical as a characteristically American art form, a medium for serious entertainment
- the first musicals were based on classical novels of European literature, as for instance *My Fair Lady* (1956)
- the musical combines music, song, dance and spoken dialogues, is closely related to the opera but differs from opera in that it uses popular music, different instrumentation and unaccompanied dialogue

European Musical

- the **operetta** is sometimes considered the European counterpart of the musical, it developed from the opera as a more accessible version suitable for mass audiences
- the American musical is meant for **entertainment**, whereas the European musical tends to be more **serious** in subject matter and often focuses on political issues, for instance Bertolt Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera* (1928)

Arthur Miller (1915–2005)

The Private & the Public

- continues examining the failure of individuals to acknowledge full responsibility for themselves and for others
- considers identity to be a product of decisions made or refused, insists on the existence of a connective tissue that inevitably links **private actions to public events**, individual to community, self to society, past to present
- his later plays reveal a fascination with the nature of character, the power of story and the substance of reality
- his early plays suggest that reality can be easily identified and that moral and social certainties derive from it

Nature of Reality

- his later plays show a growing sense of the deceptive nature of the real and distrust of the banality of surfaces
- the questions are if a world that is substantially the sum of **private interpretations** and **public myths** can be said to be real or, as we live in a house of mirrors, if we will ever see anything but a reflection of our illusions
- examines the degree to which we are all but 'impersonators' of ourselves, the extent to which we are 'actors'
- believes in the obligation of trying to ascertain the real, since to abandon the attempt is to surrender also any sense of responsibility until 'everything becomes a question of taste, including the hanging of innocent people'

Artist's Responsibility

The Archbishop's Ceiling (1977)

- uses the setting of an unnamed East European country to consider an artist's political and moral responsibility
- a visiting American writer wonders if he cares about the plight of the people or simply uses them as material
- another question is if the two European writers whom the American meets are spies or simply complicit in the suppression and surveillance that scar their country, where the most innocent conversation loses its innocence
- the characters meet in a baroque palace in a room that may or may not contain concealed microphones, and the fact of the possible presence of the microphones transforms them all into **performers acting out their dramas**
- suggests a parallel to the then topical Watergate Scandal²¹ in which the American president had turned the Oval Room into a form of theatre, alternately recalling and forgetting the microphones that he, too, had concealed

Dying Woman

*Elegy for a Lady*²² (1982)

- an elegant and ambiguous exploration of love featuring a man who enters a shop to buy a gift for his dying lover and the proprietress of the shop who helps him to choose and takes on the persona of the dying woman
- opens with a motionless man and woman, devoid of character, function and identity, continues with generating a story from bringing them together and closes with the man leaving and the woman becoming motionless again

Former Lovers

Some Kind of Love Story (1982)

- a tense and intimate investigation of the strange relationship between a private detective and his former lover whom he questions about a murder and who may or may not possess the clue to the crime that he investigates
- the meaning of their encounter comes from their roles and from the story that unites them, they are lovers and investigator and witness, he is also a married man and she a schizophrenic changing a succession of identities

²¹ In 1972 five men were arrested for breaking into the headquarters of the Democratic Party in Watergate, Washington D. C. In 1974 President Richard Nixon resigned when it was proved that he actively tried to conceal that the burglary was ordered by Republicans as one of a whole series of illegal activities authorized and carried out by his staff against their political opponents.

²² *Elegy for a Lady* and *Some Kind of Love Story* are two related short plays published together under the title **Two-Way Mirror**.

The 1930s
Depression

***The American Clock* (1986)**

- looks back in subject matter to the author's earlier dramatic explorations of the national democratic experiment
- offers an epic history of the 1930s Depression in both public and personal terms in memories of two survivals
- one of the survivors dwells on the domestic and the decline of his middle-class Jewish family into poverty, the other concentrates on the social and his fortunate survival thanks to his ability to anticipate the economic crash
- together these recollections manifest a faith in the ability of the American nation to repair and redefine itself and suggest that the Depression but strengthened democracy and gave Americans back their belief in themselves
- the play catches the **critical faith** in America and the belief that the world was meant to be better characteristic of the author's best work as well as its usual intimate blend of the domestic and the political, family and history

Love in
Old Age

***I Can't Remember Anything* (1987)**

- focuses on the intricacies of love, this time in an elderly couple, to dramatize the pleasures and pains of old age

Bigamist
Husband

***The Ride Down Mount Morgan* (1991)**

- an ironic comedy, first produced in London, carefully balancing between humour and a serious moral concern
- a bigamously married man is confronted by both wives when they rush to his hospital bedside after an accident
- the bigamist believes that he could have everything and that everyone benefits from his marital arrangement
- a response to the 1980s America in which greed and self-interest are sanctioned by a culture elevating the self

American
Dream

***The Last Yankee*²³ (1993)**

- set in a state mental institution treating women for depression, a response to a society committed to the dream of success at the cost of those individuals who accepted such a dream as a social and psychological imperative
- explores the relationship between a carpenter and his wife and between a successful businessman and his wife
- the carpenter's wife comes from an immigrant family and has internalized the **need to succeed** which ruined her brothers, while her husband comes from older stock, has older values and cares little for material rewards
- ends with the possibility of a new beginning for both couples, the lights however fade out with the bed which has been holding a fellow patient throughout the play, a woman who lies motionless, never visited and ignored

Nazi
Paralysis

***Broken Glass* (1994)**

- set in 1938, the year of Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass, when the Nazi attacked Jews and synagogues
- focuses on a woman suffering a sudden **unexplained paralysis** and her relationship with her Jewish husband
- explores the roots of the wife's paralysis, which seem sunk partly in private and psychological concerns and partly in a sudden disabling sense of the gathering irrational forces that threaten her own life as well as others
- presents broken relationships and the disintegrated bonds that once held individuals and communities together
- suggests that the woman cannot stand because there is no longer anywhere to stand, no security, no certainty
- ends with the protagonist standing up when her husband dies from a heart attack, and necessity drives her up

Ageing
Pilot

***Mr Peter's Connections* (1998)**

- a minor serio-comic fantasy set in a dilapidated night club and centred around an ageing married man, former Pan Am pilot, who recalls his once glorious career and contemplates the present world full of baffling ambiguity

Second
Coming

***Resurrection Blues* (2002)**

- uses a pointed comic edge to examine the dangers and benefits of blind belief, political, religious or emotional
- set in an unnamed Latin American third-world country, centres around a prisoner who is considered the second coming of Christ and thus poses a threat to the military dictator of the nation who sentences him to be crucified
- follows the moral dilemmas of several characters concerning the crucifixion, including the dictator's wealthy cousin, his daughter allied with the prisoner and an American television team that is to broadcast the crucifixion

Marilyn
Monroe

***Finishing the Picture* (2004)**

- the author's last play, a thinly-veiled autobiographical examination of the time that the author and Marilyn Monroe, who was then his wife, spent shooting the film *The Misfits* (1961) for which he wrote the screenplay
- presents the failing marriage of the couple, plagued by Monroe's open infidelity, drug abuse and mental illness
- shows a successful actress, a natural choice for a major motion picture, whose personal problems afflict her performance so that the producer must decide whether to cancel the over-budget film or whether try to finish it

Edward Albee (b. 1928)

1970s

- in the late 1960s and in the 1970s he seems to have lost his way, his dramatic language as well as his audience
- his characters seem little more than instruments orchestrated by the dramatist and deprived of any dimension, the powerful theatricality of his early fine work appears to give way to thin and almost **antitheatrical** gestures

1990s

- in the 1990s he finds himself and starts again surprising audiences with his wit, invention and moral purpose

²³ As the play is set in New England, the 'Yankee' probably refers to a 'New Englander', a descendant of the first English settlers.

Necessity
of Dying

- his achievement is striking by his integrity, commitment to experiment and refusal of easily won popularity
- his plays show private fears and public anxieties and the belief that the greatest tragedy is an unexamined life

***The Lady from Dubuque* (1980)**

- resembles a post-apocalyptic reverie in presenting dying and the despair of it as a necessary adjunct of living

Culture of
Celebrity***The Man Who Had Three Arms* (1981)**

- presents a character called Himself who speaks about his transformation from a successful family man through a person horrified to discover a third arm growing from between his shoulder blades to a three-armed celebrity
- follows the decline of Himself attendant on his celebrity circuit, including 'money, sex, adulation', his growing more and more in debt, his being abandoned by his wife and his eventual falling apart in front of the audience
- satirizes the excesses of the culture of celebrity as well as the shallowness of parent and child relationships

Ritual
Marriage
Games***Marriage Play* (1987)**

- recalls his most successful play in that it deals with a middle-aged married couple which succumbs to playing ritual games to express and contain their sense of life-disappointment and even to fighting each other physically
- opens with the husband coming home and informing his wife that he intends to leave her, the entry and the information is repeated three times because the husband is disappointed with the wife's reaction to the news
- concludes with the couple recalling the memorable times of their life but soon resuming their previous insults

Three
Women
in One***Three Tall Women* (1991)**

- a successful play which won the author his third Pulitzer Prize (1994) and brought him back to theatre stages
- shows at first three different women, one an elderly, incontinent and apparently fast-fading lady, the others her nurse and a young lawyer; and then presents them as one and the same woman at different stages of her life
- inspired by the author's adoptive mother and himself, represented in the play as a young man who has no lines
- derives its effectiveness from the wit generated out of the interplay between the various women, each of them with a different level of awareness, from youthful naivety through middle-age experience to old-age cynicism

Young
Couple's
Baby***The Play About the Baby* (1998)**

- recapitulates themes from his earlier work in a witty debate about the way we constitute the reality we inhabit
- deals with a gleefully naive couple who has just had their first baby and whose youthful happy existence is disturbed by the appearance of a mysterious nameless older couple who may or may not have sinister motives

Limits of
Toleration***The Goat, or, Who is Sylvia?*²⁴ (2002)**

- described by the author as a play about a family deeply rocked by an unimaginable event and trying to solve it
- seeks to make the audience think about their values, as every civilization sets **arbitrary limits** to its tolerances
- centres around Martin, a renowned architect and family man, who in the same week turns fifty, earns a prestigious award and receives a lucrative commission, but is consumed by a forbidden secret passion, bestiality
- Martin's life starts disintegrating as he unburdens himself on his oldest friend and the truth reaches his family

Another
Zoo Story***Peter & Jerry* (2004)**

- adds a first act to *The Zoo Story* (1959), focuses on Peter's marriage and ends with his leaving to Central Park
- performed together under the title *At Home at the Zoo* (2009) with Act I 'Homelife' and Act II 'The Zoo Story'

Woody Allen (b. 1935)Back-
ground

- born and raised in New York, legally changed his original name Allen Steward Konigsberg to Heywood Allen
- his father was a Jewish jewellery engraver, his grandparents were Yiddish and German-speaking immigrants
- his childhood was not particularly happy, his mother was a stern person and his parents did not get along well
- studied communication and film but never earned a degree, after several false starts became a **comedy writer**
- began his career writing gags for newspaper columns, producing scripts for television comedy shows, working as a stand-up comedian and writing humorous short stories, published for instance in the *New Yorker* magazine

Career

- eventually became a scriptwriter, playwright, producer and film director, actor in his films and jazz clarinetist
- as a stand-up comedian created a persona of a nervous and **neurotic intellectual**, insecure and doubt-ridden
- as an actor in his own films most often incorporates comic figures who are wistful, wry and self-deprecating
- his writing draws on his **urban middle-class Jewish** background, literature, philosophy, psychology, sexuality
- his films are typically joke-oriented bittersweet comedies with elements of parody, slapstick and the absurd

***Don't Drink the Water* (1966)**Iron
Curtain
Farce

- a successful Broadway comedy, a farce that takes place inside an American Embassy behind the Iron Curtain
- a family on a tourist trip accidentally wanders into a restricted area to take holiday photographs, the secret

²⁴The title refers to the song 'Who is Sylvia' sung in Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* by Proteus when he woos Silvia.

police suspects espionage but the family is granted asylum in the Embassy from which they attempt to escape

Film
Parody

***Play It Again, Sam* (1969)**

- a successful Broadway play, the title is a misquotation from the film *Casablanca* (1942) at which it pokes fun
- the protagonist has just undergone a trying divorce, his two friends convince him to dating, and throughout the play he receives advices from the ghost of the *Casablanca* actor Humphrey Bogart and from his former wife
- the dates fail as he assumes a mask of an attractive sophisticate, he develops feelings for his married friend and ends the play in a parody on the *Casablanca* ending when he explains her why she should stay with her husband

Companion
Experiments

***God* (1975), *Death* (1975)**

- two companion plays, the author turned the latter into a black and white film called *Shadows and Fog* (1992)
- the former presents lonely and bored Manhattan late night theatre visitors arguing with ancient Greek masters, and the twisted and turned plot with scenes from different periods and locations reflects our bizarre human lives

Failing
Family

***The Floating Lightbulb* (1981)**

- a critically successful Broadway play, though a box-office failure, the author's last play starting on Broadway
- a semi-autobiographical story about a lower middle-class family living in Brooklyn and their failed aspirations
- the family matriarch Enid Pollack once aspired to be dancer and now spends her days trying to support the family, while her philandering husband Max spends his time gambling and planning to escape from his marriage
- their son Paul is a bright but shy teenager who performs magic tricks, including a floating light bulb illusion
- a talent agent arrives seemingly to hire Paul, but the mother is disappointed to find that he only tries to woo her

Failing
Relation-
ships

***Central Park West* (1995)**

- a one-act play, a chronicle of dysfunction in human relationships with controversial autobiographical elements
- two middle-aged women, Carol and Phyllis, meet in the Central Park West flat of Phyllis, whose husband Sam just announced her that he is leaving her for another woman, whom Phyllis suspects to be nobody else but Carol
- Carol admits that she loves her friend's husband, it is however not her for whom Sam is leaving his wife, but the young college student Juliet, who happens to be a patient on a psychoanalysis therapy led by Phyllis herself

Infidelity
Games

***Old Saybrook*²⁵ (2003)**

- a one-act play, a farce about infidelity reminiscent of Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962)
- an accountant and his wife drop by the house they once lived in only to get drawn into into the new tenants' comic slipstream of sexual confession and accusation which continues until the characters produce a wildcard
- the wildcard is a playwright who appears to comment on the failure of the play, describing it as something that seemed a great idea but then it did not work, then leaves the characters who perform a parody of a happy ending

Savage
Impulses

***Riverside Drive* (2003)**

- a one-act play, a dark comedy of a homeless genius who stalks a screenwriter, convinced that he stole his idea
- the screenwriter, Jim Swain, and his pursuer, Fred Savage, confront each other on a bench on Riverside Drive where the self-absorbed author waits for his lover Barbara to break up with her and to return to his own wife
- Barbara threatens Swain and demands compensation in money for her not telling Swain's wife, Swain intends to apologize to her but Savage murders her on impulse and disposes of her body, tossing it in the Hudson River
- Savage, as his name suggests, represents the wild, infantile, murderous impulses which are here meditated on

Memory
Play

***A Second Hand Memory* (2004)**

- a memory play presented by Alma, the bad child who had an abortion and ran from her parents off to Europe
- the parents put all hopes on Eddie, the good child who lives with his parents and works in their jewellery shop
- the play tells about Eddie's transformation from a docile hard-working boy into a restless and resentful young man when he is employed by his uncle, a Hollywood agent, and falls in love with the uncle's secretary-mistress

Short
Stories

***Getting Even* (1971), *Without Feathers* (1975), *Side Effects* (1980)**

- collections of brief humorous sketches, originally published in the *New Yorker* as well as in other magazines

Films

***Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989), *Husbands and Wives* (1992), *Bullets Over Broadway* (1994)**

- low-budget films produced outside of the Hollywood system, a mix of absurd humour and realistic situations

David Mamet (b. 1947)

Language
Illusion

- preoccupied with language not just as a communicative tool but a way to give the **illusion of substance** to life
- explores characters who create a local habitation and a name for themselves out of fast and smart conversation
- his characteristic language is not so much the idiom of an actual subculture but an intensely poetic instrument
- repetition, intensification, a shared jargon of the characters create a sense of a closed world with its own games

²⁵ *Old Saybrook* was published together with *Riverside Drive* under the title ***Writer's Block*** (2003).

Substitute
Fantasy

- the question is not whether what the character says is right or not, but whether the character makes it sound so
- his familiar trademarks are presenting the language as a substitute for meaning, selling as a mask for substance
- emphasizes the special status of those **in the game**, focuses on collisions of different word systems and worlds
- presents the characters not so much as liars as fantasists who use words to suspend disbelief in their fantasies
- comments not only on the fictions of a particular group but on the collective fictions, the myths of his country

Real Estate
America***Glengarry Glen Ross* (1984)**

- the play plunges into the dark heart of the selling of America by focusing on real estate agents conducting sales
- the title of the play is the fantasy name given to the tracts of land for sale which are actually worthless swamps
- revalues the perverse resourcefulness of the salesmen and their desperate faith which they need to earn living, to combine the cynicism appropriate to their fraudulent trade with a belief in the power of their sales techniques
- the language of the salesmen tells their story, 'a great sale' is the fiction that gives false meaning to their lives
- challenges the American myth of success, selling oneself, like in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949)

Hollywood
Underbelly***Speed-the-Plow* (1988)**

- the play is set in the Hollywood of flattery and fake intimacy and satirizes the American film making industry
- the title refers to the saying 'Industry produces wealth, God speed the plough', which the author saw as fitting for a play dealing with work, the end of the world and also with having to plough under and start over again
- Hollywood producers Bobby Gould and Charlie Fox engage in a verbal boxing match on art versus money, the former hesitates between recommending a bad action success or a film adaptation of a spiritually uplifting novel
- Gould makes an office girl read the apocalyptic novel and come to report on it later in his flat, which she does, only to become a victim the next day when Fox accuses her of using sex in order to get into the film business

Sexual
Harassment***Oleanna* (1992)**

- a controversial play on sexual harassment, a story of a female student who denounces her university professor
- the play does not make it clear whether the student has a legitimate grievance or whether she is working with her 'group' to achieve a kind of ethical cleansing, or whether there is an intriguing mix of both at work here

Female
Relation-
ships***Boston Marriage*²⁶ (1999)**

- the play is set at the turn of the twentieth century and is delivered through a quick, witty Victorian-era dialogue
- explores the negotiation, conflict, compromise and reconciliation arising from the relationship of two women
- two women living together in a Boston Marriage, Anna and Claire, argue over Claire's new love, a young girl, and Anna's status as a mistress to a wealthy gentleman, and find out that the girl is the daughter of the same man
- the plot focuses on the question whether Anna and Claire will be able to hold on both to the girl and her father

Courtroom
Farce***Romance* (2005)**

- an off-Broadway comedy, a farce set in a modern-day courtroom in New York during Middle East peace talks
- features a judge whose allergy medications make him so drowsy that he falls asleep several times during the first act and then so manic that he eventually ends up stripping in the middle of the court during the second act
- also features a prosecutor who has troubles with his unmanageable boyfriend and a gentile lawyer who has troubles with his Jewish defendant, who suddenly comes up with a plan to solve the conflict in the Middle East
- lampoons the American judicial system and the hypocrisy about personal prejudice and political correctness

Presidential
Election***November* (2007)**

- an Oval Office satire, the play depicts one day in the life of an American President finishing his election period
- the President, Charles Smith, has little chances for re-election but he risks all in attempt to win public support
- described as a comedy, hilariously satirizes the state of America and the lengths to which people will go to win

Racial
Prejudice***Race* (2009)**

- the play premièred on Broadway and examines the theme of race and the lies we tell each other on the subject
- follows three attorneys, two black and one white, who are offered a chance to defend a white man charged with a crime against a black woman and who struggle with the evidence of the case and their feelings about race

Tony Kushner (b. 1956)

Writing

- a **homosexual** playwright, social and political **activist**, author of clever original plays mostly on topical issues
- his plays often depart from the traditional realistic representation, experiments with conventional storytelling by introducing shorter episodes, unexpected transitions and fast-paced action reinforced by condensed dialogues

Hitler
& Reagan***A Bright Room Called Day* (1985)**

- his controversial first play, written as a response to Bertolt Brecht's *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich* (1938)

²⁶ The term 'Boston Marriage' was inspired by Henry James's *The Bostonians* (1886) and refers to the arrangement of two unmarried women living together without any man's support. Such a relationship may involve intimacy and commitment without sexuality.

- the main story line is set in Germany in the 1930s and concerns the dissolution of a small circle of friends under the pressures created by the fall of the Weimar Republic and the rise to power of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi
- the action is occasionally interrupted by scenes set in America in the 1980s and featuring a young woman who implies a parallel between the rise of Nazis in Germany and Republicanism in America under Ronald Reagan²⁷
- the author commented on the play, explaining that he refuses to be intimidated by the seemingly implacable nature of the Holocaust and suggesting that the Right is far from dead, the ghosts of the past still walk the world

Master-
piece

***Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* (1991–1992)**

- a monumental seven-hour epic in two parts; the first part, *Millennium Approaches* (1991) won a Tony Award and a Pulitzer Prize (1993), the second part, *Perestroika*²⁸ (1992) won the author his second Tony Award (1994)
- a **carnavalesque** picture of America in the 1980s, a time of literal and symbolic **plague**, combines myth and fantasy with an analysis of the social, political and sexual pressures threatening the individual and community
- beyond the specific concern with AIDS, the play celebrates that pluralism most suspect in the 1980s America in bringing together seemingly disparate elements, making for instance a Jewish gay involved with a Mormon
- the author describes the play as a call for gay America to grab power in the war for tolerance and against AIDS
- may be seen as a play of redemption lying in the simultaneous acknowledgement and transcendence of history, suggests the need for individuals to neutralize obsolete entrapping myths by generating new myths of their own

Collapse
of Order

***Slavs! Thinking About the Longstanding Problems of Virtue and Happiness* (1994)**

- an exploration of the implications of the collapse of order in the twentieth century and especially in the USSR
- considers the difficulty, the failure and the abiding importance of socialism toward building a more just society

Civil Rights
Musical

***Caroline, or Change* (1999)**

- a musical set in Louisiana in the 1960s, the time of the Civil Rights Movement and the Kennedy assassination
- Caroline, a black maid, and Noah, son of her Jewish employers, struggle to find an identity for their friendship
- Noah deliberately leaves change in his pockets for Caroline to take it and support her children, which she reluctantly does, but their relationship collapses when Caroline is accused of stealing a twenty-dollar banknote
- addresses contemporary questions of culture, community, race and class through the musical lens of the 1960s

Afghanistan
& America

***Homebody/Kabul* (1999)**

- the play addresses the relationship between Afghanistan and the West, examines our floundering attempts to connect with other people and cultures and the kaleidoscopic and contradictory images marring all our attempts
- follows the tangential thought processes of a woman who is fascinated by Afghanistan and whose encounter with an Afghan man with severed fingers provides her with an agonised testimony of the fundamentalist cruelty
- the woman's narrative constantly shifts, from episodes in Afghan history to elliptic observations about her life
- exposes the uncomfortable questions in our lives and shows up the **liberal conscience** in all its flawed dignity

Family
Drama

***The Intelligent Homosexual's Guide to Capitalism and Socialism with a Key to the Scriptures* (2009)**

- a naturalistic drama about an extended family of intellectuals dealing with their retired patriarch's suicide wish
- the title is inspired by G. B. Shaw's *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* (1928) as well as by Mary Baker Eddy's *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (1875), the bible of Christian Scientists
- centres at a retired longshoreman who feels confused and defeated by the onset of the twenty-first century and whose three children bring along spouses, ex-spouses, lovers and more to an unusual reunion with their father

²⁷ President Reagan (in office 1981–1989) introduced Reaganomics, a supply-side economics supporting people producing goods and offering services. He also reduced public spending on health care, social security, education etc. and restricted government control of economy. By increasing defence budget, he raised national debts and turned the the US from a creditor into a debtor.

²⁸ Perestroika is Russian for 'restructuring', originally used to refer to the reforms of the Soviet political and economic system introduced by Mikhail Gorbachev (1987). It is often credited with the fall of communism in the USSR and end of the Cold War.

(6) Modern American War Novel

Norman Mailer, James Jones, Joseph Heller, Kurt Vonnegut, Tim O'Brien, Michael Herr

Wartime Presidents

- 1930s
to 1970s
Presidents
- Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882–1945): in office 1933–1945, 32nd President
 - Harry S. Truman (1884–1972): in office 1945–1953, 33rd President
 - Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890–1969): in office 1953–1961, 34th President
 - John F. Kennedy (1917–1963): in office 1961–1963, 35th President
 - Lyndon B. Johnson (1908–1973): in office 1963–1969, 36th President
 - Richard Nixon (1913–1994): in office 1969–1974, 37th President
 - Gerald Ford (1913–2006): in office 1974–1977, 38th President

Second World War (1st Sept 1939–2nd Sept 1945)

- Outbreak
- the Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union invade Poland and split the conquered territory between themselves
 - the United States prepare for a war of defence and do not intend to enter the war and interfere in foreign affairs
 - Japan experiences a depression and attempts to rebuild the nation by attacking European colonies in the Pacific
- US Entry
- the US send a fleet to the Pacific to protect Hawaii, Japan attacks surprisingly at **Pearl Harbor** (7th Dec 1941)
 - the US declare war on Japan (8th Dec 1941), on which Germany and Italy declare war on the US and vice versa
 - Europe battles were commanded by Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, Pacific battles by Gen. Douglas MacArthur
- Allied
Victory
- the Allies liberated French towns in the **Invasion of Normandy**, Operation Overlord on D-Day (6th June 1944)
 - Germany surrendered on V-E Day (Victory in Europe Day, 8th May 1945), Japan failed to follow its example
 - the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima (6th Aug 1945) and Nagasaki (9th Aug 1945), Japan surrendered on V-J Day (Victory over Japan Day, 15th Aug 1945)
- Peace
Talks
- the heads of the United States (Franklin Delano Roosevelt), Great Britain (Winston Churchill) and the USSR (Joseph Stalin) met at the **Yalta Conference** (4th to 11th Feb 1945) where they negotiated the sphere of influence
 - the United Nations were founded to replace the original League of Nations set up after the First World War
 - the US and USSR differences over the post-war shape of Europe and regimes led to the Cold War (1947–1991)

Korean War (1950–1953)

- Korean
Civil War
- Korea was divided along the 38th parallel, the North being supervised by the USSR and the South by the US
 - the North attacked the South in an attempt to reunite the region and managed to gain much of the southern area
- US Inter-
vention
- President Harry S. Truman decided to intervene into the Korean Civil War as a member of the United Nations
 - Gen. Douglas MacArthur won most of the northern area, but China intervened and pushed the US to the South
 - the field war operations did not last more than several months, it was the negotiations that took several years

Vietnam War (1959–1975)

- Vietnam
Civil War
- Vietnam was a part of French Indochina, but the French were defeated by the communist China (1954) and the country was divided into the communist North and the democratic South, where the US were military advisers
 - the North attacked the South (1959), and in the ensuing civil war the South joined the communist Viet Cong
- US Inter-
vention
- in the **Gulf of Tonkin Resolution (1964)** President Lyndon B. Johnson announced that the US would undertake necessary measures as a reaction against the alleged attack of North Vietnam on US ships at Tonkin
 - the Viet Cong action known as **Tet Offensive (1968)** resulted in the strategic and psychological victory of the North, after which the US recognized that the war could not be won, but the negotiations took five more years
 - the peace agreement was closed (1973), the war ended in the victory of the North which won the South (1975)

American War Novel

- WWI/WWII
Home Front
- the American participation in the WWI was brief and casualties relatively light, the WWII was a turning point
 - the WWI left the nation largely unaffected, stubbornly sticking to small-town values and middle-class morality
 - the WWII home front saw mobility of women²⁹ into the factories and blacks from the South to the war plants, Japanese Americans were removed from the West Coast to Relocation Camps and had their property confiscated
 - the aftermath of the WWII brought back a more conservative view of gender roles, gender stereotypes returned
 - the WWII contributed to the **masculinization** of American writing, with emphasis on courage tested in crisis

²⁹ Before the WWII married women did not have jobs; due to the absence of men during the war women were hired for hard labour, including black women. A woman working to support the war economy was dubbed Rosie the Riveter.

Mailer
and Jones:
Histories

- the WWII novels followed the examples of war novels like Hemingway's *In Our Time* (1925) or Cummings's *The Enormous Room* (1922) or 1930s novels like Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* (1936) or Farrell's *Studs Lonigan* (1935)
- most serious novels dealt but with a handful of incidents, a small conflict, usually one the writer witnessed, both Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* (1948) and Jones's *The Thin Red Line* (1962) with a single island capture
- both Mailer and Jones use flashbacks to fill in the civilian lives of soldiers so that the novels, circumscribed by the three classical unities, become **microcosms** not only of the war but a larger American **society** in transition
- most novels were written after the war, so writers projected their sense of the postwar world back onto the war
- the WWII novel looks both backward to the social fiction of the Depression, as Jones's *From Here to Eternity* (1951), and forward to the postwar black humour and anguished sense of alienation, as Heller's *Catch-22* (1961)

Heller and
Vonnegut:
Anti-
histories

- later war novels are marked by the fading of the immediate feeling of joy and relief and the onset of the horror of the aftermath, as the Holocaust news, the new technology of mass destruction, the Cold War or the arms race
- earlier novels, as by Mailer or Jones, are historical novels in that they present campaigns with their beginnings, middles and ends, they represent microcosms of the war as a whole and sometimes of the whole society in war
- later novels, like those by Heller, Vonnegut or Pynchon, present a static war in which nothing happens, they are **antihistorical** novels with no sense of unfolding history, their pattern is **circular** rather than developmental
- the 1960s war novels deal less with the war and more with the Holocaust, Cold War, atomic war and Vietnam
- the Holocaust narrative eventually displaces the combat narrative as the writers' principal vision of the WWII
- the post-1960s novels share a comic-book mood of sheer lunacy and the reduction of individuals to nonentities

WWII
Fiction

- the **WWII** novels stress the shock of the **new experience**, social and personal dislocation and shock of carnage
- show the recruits being forced to adjust to the army hierarchy and discipline cutting against the American grain
- demonstrate how the young men were influenced morally by being exposed to killing and dying at an early age
- suggest that the survivors come out not as heroes, their heroism is often accidental, but simply as changed men

Vietnam
Novels

- the **Vietnam** novels draw on Heller's **absurdism** and the magic realism popularized by Latin American writers
- convey the lack of sense of a front, an enemy or a purpose, little prospect of victory and little sense of honour
- mediate the nightmarish qualities, the hellish sense of unreality of fighting in monsoon rains and jungle heat
- seem to take place in a vacuum, the sense of the world back home is dissipated and unlearned by the soldiers
- capture the sense of entrapment, horror, moral ambiguity, disillusionment, loss of faith and a grim awakening
- the Vietnam War inspired many films by different directors with different approaches, as Hal Ashby's *Coming Home* (1978), Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter* (1978), Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979), Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1986) or *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989)

Norman Mailer (1923–2007)

Back-
ground

- helped to create **New Journalism**, a form taking actual events to submit them to imaginative transformation
- preoccupied with the exploration of power, its different manifestations, its expressions and modes of operation
- served in the **WWII** with a cavalry battalion in the Philippines, though he was not involved in much fighting

The Naked and the Dead (1948)

WWII
Master-
piece

- a WWII novel written in the tradition of American **naturalism**, dealing with the Pacific Theatre of Operation
- described by the author as 'a parable about the movement of man through history' that shows 'man corrupted, confused to the point of helplessness' but also finds out that there are 'limits beyond which he cannot be pushed'
- also shows that 'even in this corruption and sickness' of society man holds on to 'yearnings for a better world'
- the parable is executed in terms of flesh and blood, depicting the capture of a **Pacific island** from the Japanese

Characters

- a view on the ground of the combatant soldier is provided through the reconnaissance platoon under Sgt. Croft
- the strategic view of the operation is presented in conceptions of Gen. Cummings, a person with fascist beliefs
- these two views and levels to the action are connected by the character of Lieut. Hearn, a middle-class liberal
- Sgt. Croft is represented as the natural fascist, a sadist who kills for the thrill of killing, while Gen. Cummings as the intellectual fascist, who not only enacts but also expresses his beliefs in the future of the power morality
- the eight men of the reconnaissance platoon are a representative cross-section of multi-ethnic American society
- **character stereotypes** include the pompous general, the vicious sergeant, the college-educated lieutenant, the cringing Jews, the lascivious Southern redneck, the guilt-ridden Irishman, the frightened Mexican and so forth
- flashbacks of the 'Time Machine', inspired by Dos Passos's *U.S.A.*, present the pre-war lives of the characters

Strategies

- presents the ineffectiveness of Cummings's chessboard strategy as well as Croft's superhuman Ahab-like drive
- bleak **irony** underlies the narrative, for instance the island is captured thanks not to the strategies of a general but to the actions of an incompetent major, and the capturing of the island eventually serves no useful purpose
- shows the physical and mental testing of men driven beyond the limits of exhaustion by the obsessive Crofts
- at the end the platoon men reach the point where they can be oppressed no further, as manifested in their return

Hunting
Novel

- the men stumble into a nest of hornets, from which they flee in terror down a slope, discarding their weapons and understanding that 'if they threw away enough possessions, they would not be able to continue their patrol'

***Why We in Vietnam?* (1967)**

- circulates around an imaginative investigation of power on a national level as well as on the international one
- concerned with the national fantasies of power that prompted America into its imperialist venture in Vietnam
- narrated by a character called D. J., written in a wild surreal idiom that replicates the patter of disc jockeys
- follows a larger-than-life hunting trip, reminiscent of hunting in the fiction of Cooper, Hemingway or Faulkner
- shows the young protagonist-narrator brought by his wealthy father on a hunting trip in an obsessive pursuit of a grizzly bear and his increasing disillusion with his father's hunting tactics that seem dishonest and cowardly
- may be read as a growing-up novel, ends with the protagonist's announcement that he is to serve in Vietnam

James Jones (1921–1977)

Service

- joined the army before the **WWII** as a way of escaping the Depression and the responsibilities of civilian life

Pre-war
Novel***From Here to Eternity* (1951)**

- a grimly realistic story set within the regular army in **Hawaii** in the months leading to the Pearl Harbor attack
- set specifically in and around the Schofield Barracks located near Honolulu, where the author himself served
- the common soldiers are refugees from an economically depressed and socially constricted small-town life
- the officers are nearly always petty, selfish, ambitious, time-serving careerists who exercise power arbitrarily
- the protagonist is an aching proud hero, a coal miner's son, resembling a figure out of the proletarian novel
- Robert Prewitt, as his name indicates, is much of a **romantic rebel**, doomed, self-destructive, with his own code of honour, caught between his love of the army and inability to accept its harsh and often unfair discipline
- his unbending code of morality leads to catastrophe in his and other people's lives, eventually to his own death

Pre-combat
Novella***The Pistol* (1959)**

- set immediately after the shocking Pearl Harbor attack, centres at the college educated Private Richard Mast
- evolves around the pistol that Mast receives when he is called to duty and the hope that it represents for him in face of the **expected attack** of the Japanese samurai, against whom the long rifles of his fellows are ineffective
- the novella describes the attempts of Mast's fellow soldiers to retrieve the pistol from him, Mast's desperate clinging to the pistol as a symbol of hope and his eventual relief when an officer takes the pistol back from him

WWII
Master-
piece***The Thin Red Line* (1962)**

- focuses on the first offensive action after Pearl Harbor and the first American victory in the **Pacific Theatre**, that is the invasion and conquest of Guadalcanal in 1942, the turning point in the morale of American soldiers
- begins with the landing of men, some of them longtime regular soldiers who have never been in combat, and goes on with stages of fear, disbelief, exhaustion, camaraderie, numbness, injury, unheroic victory and removal
- mobilizes a huge cast of characters, also many of *From Here to Eternity*, and gives them monosyllabic names, newly introduces a largely autobiographical character, Fife, whose experiences closely follow the author's own
- emphasizes the aspects of **courage** and fear of men new to combat and most of all the utter **cowardice** of Fife
- presents an unheroic and often comic view of war, partly reflecting the mood of the late 1950s and early 1960s
- may be finally read as a growing-up novel, telling the tale of how a raw youth all too quickly becomes a man

Post-war
Novel***Whistle* (1978)**

- written when the author was already seriously ill and published posthumously, reflects the post-Vietnam mood
- deals with the **post-combat** fate of wounded men in a military hospital back home while the war still continues
- presents the war as remote and distant, but also as an ever-present physical intrusion in the injuries of the men

Joseph Heller (1923–1999)

Service

- served in the **WWII** with a bomb squadron in Italy and flew sixty combat missions as an airplane bombardier

WWII
Master-
piece***Catch-22* (1961)**

- employs disjointed narrative technique, nightmare sequences and bleak **humour** to depict a world gone crazy
- the narrative does not unfold chronologically, there is no real sequence to the men's experience, it is anchored by rather arbitrary points of reference, as Yossarian's hospital stays or the number of required bombing missions
- the intricate narrative pattern enables characters who are already dead in one chapter to be still alive in a later chapter, pinned all the more ineluctably to their determined fate, everything seems to be happening continuously
- shows the protagonist Yossarian as the victim of a mad conspiratorial military and political complex, caught in a **closed system** from which his simple desire to escape proves his sanity and so his fitness to go on serving it
- burlesques a realistic view of the war, shows the war with a pervasive sense of unreality, an element of insanity

- discards psychological portrayals of characters with naturalistic details, rather exaggerates them into **cartoons**
- shows his affinity with shlemiel humour, the serious comedy of victimization, based on his Jewish background
- **satirizes** bureaucracy and the insanity of the organizational mind in making the real life of the characters differ from their official life; the dead man in Yossarian's tent never arrived and the living Doc Daneeka officially died

Non-war
Novels

***Something Happened* (1974)**

- uses the same comic strategies and verbal riffs as *Catch-22*, but is full of desperation, cruelty and self-loathing
- presents a nearly anonymous character who hates his family and job yet is powerless to get away from them

***Good as Gold* (1979)**

- satirizes his Jewish outlook and upbringing which provided for his savagely funny sense of the ironies of life

***Closing Time* (1994)**

- revisits some of the characters of *Catch-22*, including the protagonist, to show the later lives of WWII veterans

Kurt Vonnegut (1922–2007)

Service

- served in the **WWII** as a private, along with few other scouts wandered behind enemy lines, was captured and imprisoned in Dresden where he survived the bombing in underground slaughterhouse meat locker number five

American
Nazi Thug

***Mother Night* (1961)**

- employs cartoonish elements and ingenious reversals and doublings to tell the story of a misplaced American
- the protagonist-narrator moved to Germany after the WWI, where he became alternately both a well-known playwright in the German language and a **Nazi propagandist**, who awaits his trial for war crimes in a prison

Atom Bomb
Inventor

***Cat's Cradle* (1963)**

- explores issues of science, technology and religion, satirizing the **arms race** as well as other ills of society
- derives its title from the string game that the fictional inventor of the atom bomb played when it was dropped

WWII
Master-
piece

***Slaughterhouse-Five, or, The Children's Crusade: A Duty Dance with Death* (1969)**

- circulates around the punitive bombing of **Dresden**, which the author himself witnessed as a prisoner of war
- tries to make sense of the author's haunting experience by making the protagonist a **shell-shocked** simpleton
- shows a protagonist who 'comes unstuck in time', whose experiences seem to be happening all at once, whose memories cannot be sorted out or exorcised, which seems to be the only way of writing about the unthinkable
- suggests that one of the main effects of war is that people are discouraged from being characters, the shock of history nullifies individual agency, the veterans lack the courage to become a character and lead a coherent life

Billy
Pilgrim's
Progress

- presents a character who suffers mental breakdowns, marked by a failure to feel combined with an inability to forget, and whose anaesthetized, mechanical behaviour is reflected in the nerveless, repetitive narrative style
- repeats its benumbing fatalistic refrain 'so it goes' always when anyone dies or when anything awful happens
- interweaves **science fiction** and **satire**, comedy and a bleak determinism, black humour and surreal fantasy
- employs the time-warp technique to present the protagonist, Billy Pilgrim, plodding through his dull middle age life in suburban America while simultaneously alive and comfortable on the distant planet of Tralfamadore
- provides at the same time ironic commentary on our inhumanity and the opportunity for destruction by new technology, satire on the bourgeois suburbia standards and exploration of human inconsequence and impotence

Tim O'Brien (b. 1946)

Back-
ground

- born and brought up in Austin, Minnesota, a setting which figures prominently in much of his fictional writing
- served two years in the **Vietnam** War as an infantry foot soldier, was wounded and subsequently discharged

Writing

- writes from the perspective of an ordinary foot soldier, boldly confronts some of the worst aspects of Vietnam
- writes as an eyewitness, a fortunate but troubled survivor, who seeks to make his fiction a form of testimony
- focuses on the impossibility of seeing anything clearly in a war zone and the difficulty of conveying **the truth**
- moves freely between the lines of fiction and nonfiction, in some stories uses a character named Tim O'Brien

Vietnam
Journalism

***If I Die in a Combat Zone, Box Me Up and Ship Me Home* (1973)**

- a series of linked sketches, originally journalistic pieces produced during his reporting for the *Washington Post*

Post-
Vietnam
Novel

***Northern Lights* (1975)**

- explores the complex relationship of two brothers, one a veteran of Vietnam, set in a hostile town in Minnesota

Vietnam
Master-
piece

***Going After Cacciato* (1978)**

- ranks as one of the most outstanding fictional narratives on Vietnam, won the author the National Book Award
- splinters the relationship between past and present so as to be able to do justice to the **surreal** sense of the war
- mixes realistic chapters set in the war with whimsical, picaresque chapters on the tracking of a missing soldier

- punctuates the chapters by short observations set in the mind of the protagonist during his tour of guard duty
- employs a circular structure, begins and ends with chapters including a handful of facts about the soldier's disappearance and weaves backwards and forwards from memories of the war to the possibilities of life out of it
- combines the retrospective and the prospective and explores not so much the war itself as the mind of the war
- uses the perspective of a foot soldier named Paul Berlin, interweaves his horrific memories over the preceding five months with the imaginary adventures of a group of soldiers marching across Asia to the Paris Peace Talks
- stretches to **magic realism** as it traces the epic journey of the breakaway group pursuing the deserter Cacciato

Cold War
Novel***The Nuclear Age* (1981)**

- a minor novel concerning a middle-aged man's paranoid obsession with and preparations for the nuclear war

Vietnam
Stories***The Things They Carried* (1990)**

- a collection of stories presenting Vietnam as a postmodern realm of the indefinite, ambiguous and open-ended
- fuses reality and fantasy as it explores the futility of searching for the truth about what happens, or why, in war

Post-
Vietnam
Novel***In the Lake of the Woods* (1994)**

- a relatively more conventional novel about the legacy of the Vietnam past as it haunts the American present

Michael Herr (b. 1940)

Service

- served not as a soldier but spent over a year moving around in **Vietnam** as a war correspondent for the *Esquire*
- later collaborated on screenplays for the Vietnam films *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987)

Vietnam
Master-
piece***Dispatches* (1977)**

- written in the vein of **New Journalism**, regarded one of the pioneering works in the genre of nonfiction novel
- captures the brutally material yet also dreamlike or hallucinatory quality of combat, its strangely unreal reality
- lets the erratic rhythms of war dictate the rhythm of the narrative, switching from standstill to hysterical action
- develops a nervous, explosive, rifflike style, suffused with dread, to give a sense of being there on the ground
- works the feeling of the war into the texture of the prose, charged with arresting images and cutting metaphors
- deploys direct address, pacy language, the syncopations of jazz, rock and pop to register the **sixties spectacle**, which is in part John Wayne movie, in part rock-and-roll concert, redneck riot, media event and a bad drug trip
- focuses on 'grunts', the ordinary infantrymen who try to make their way through the war with the help of black humour, bleak cynicism and the belief that the only logical thing in an illogical world is just to go with the flow

(7) The New Yorker Fiction Writers

John Updike, John Cheever, Donald Barthelme, Joyce Carol Oates

American Magazines

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| Magazine Platforms | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> magazines have been forming the American literature since the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries newspaper supplements also publish fiction, but their impact is lesser as they are distributed on a regional basis the boom of weekly and bi-weekly magazines began in the 1920s to 1930s and dissolved in the mid-1980s The Saturday Evening Post (since 1821): among the most widely circulated weeklies, publishing much fiction Harper's Magazine (since 1850): among American oldest continuously published monthlies of general interest Cosmopolitan (since 1886): began as a family magazine, turned into literary, then women's magazine (1960s) Collier's Weekly (1888–1957): a pioneering magazine in investigative journalism, a platform for muckrakers Esquire (since 1932): a men's monthly, open to new authors and to publishing essays and social commentaries Playboy (since 1953): a men's monthly founded by Hugh Hefner, reputed for its interviews with public figures Rolling Stone (since 1967): initially a hippie magazine, now a bi-weekly on music, politics and popular culture |
| Literary Magazines | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> academic journals: The Sewanee Review³⁰ (1892), The Southern Review (1935), The Georgia Review (1947) |

The New Yorker (since 1925)

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| History | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> originally a weekly magazine set up by the journalist Harold Ross (1925), who edited it until his death (1951) published accurate reportage, urbanely humorous and satirical articles, lively reviewing, stories and poetry exercised a considerable influence over American journalism and humorous writing from 1945 to the 1970s ranked as a very prestigious magazine and the most profitable for writers whose work was commissioned |
| Content | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> catered mostly for upper middle-class urban readers, mostly from the North, tended to conform to their taste preferred psychological stories about family affairs, marital problems and children and parents relationships avoided controversial and scandalous subjects, did not venture into publishing taboo topics like violence or sex getting published was at first difficult for humorists, as two were on the staff (E. B. White, James Thurber) |
| Contributors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> E. B. White (1899–1985): story writer, humorist, essayist, critic; author of 'The Hour of Letdown' (1951) James Thurber (1894–1961): story writer, humorist, cartoonist; author of <i>Fables for Our Time</i> (1940, updated fables), <i>The 13 Clocks</i> (1950, a children's fantasy) or <i>A Thurber Carnival</i> (1960, a revue based on his writings) contributors: the poet Galway Kinnell, the Southerners Richard Ford, Elizabeth Spencer and Peter Taylor |

John Updike (1932–2009)

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Writing Subjects | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> author of novels, short stories, poetry, literary and art criticism, a life-long prolific associate of the <i>New Yorker</i> a chronicler of 'American, Protestant, small-town, middle-class' life, which he portrays with subtle realism confronts the everyday common questions as fidelity, responsibility or religion, also responds to topical issues tends to expound upon characters from his earlier novels to reintroduce them in the later decades of their lives |
| Characters in Tension | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> makes his characters inhabit the boundary between the intensity of life and the inevitability of death, between dreams of freedom and the comforts of a compromised suburban environment, living in a situation of tension believes that tension is a peculiar feature to a person, a truly adjusted person is not a person at all, so that his characters all perform and pursue their maladjustments, enacting the beauty and the terror of their own duality his characters are obsessed with waste, human and universal, with decay of human bodies and things of nature |
| Escaping the Void | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> sets the possibility of love against the dread of the void, suggesting that 'a man in love ceases to fear death' offers also the comforts of the customary, routine and structure, though these may feel like a prison at times; the void may be both terrifying and liberating, the structures of our routines both comforting and claustrophobic describes in his whole work the imminence of the void, the dread fear of death and the dim possibility of grace |
| Writing Style | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> makes use of sly allusion to myth, folktale and fairytale, at times playfully mixes genres or temporal planes favours rich, unusual and sometimes arcane vocabulary conveyed through the eyes of 'a wry, intelligent authorial voice' that extravagantly describes the physical world while remaining squarely in the realist tradition recognizable for the severe elegance of his prose that combines the demotic and the exalted, the documentary and the magical, detailing the contemporary American suburb while suggesting the existence of another world |
| Poetry | <p>The Carpentered Hen and Other Tame Creatures (1958)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> collects his intellectual witty poetry on the absurdities of modern life, originally published in the <i>New Yorker</i> |
| Novels | <p>The Poorhouse Fair (1959)</p> |

³⁰ Based in Sewanee, Tennessee, the oldest continuously published literary magazine and academic journal in the United States.

Ageing
Teacher

- his first novel, on a carnival, a ‘brainless celebration of the fact of existence’, another way of fighting the void

The Centaur³¹ (1963)

- one of his most appreciated novels outside of any of his series, won the author his first National Book Award
- alludes to the myth of Chiron, the first centaur and revered tutor, to give the story a ‘counterpoint of identity’
- focuses on an ageing schoolteacher, George Caldwell, coming to terms with his decline and imminent death
- reflects on a time ‘when consciousness was a mere pollen drifting in darkness’ and his own annihilation, finds himself preoccupied with the wasting of nature and bitterly insists on the fact that ‘things never fail to fail’
- contrasts the resigned and depressed attitude of the older man with the youthful aspirations of his son, Peter, who dreams of becoming a painter and shares with his father the wish to escape the limitations of his hometown

Country
v. City***Of The Farm*** (1965)

- set in Pennsylvania, where the author was born and grew up, and where most of his early fiction takes place
- focuses on a moderately successful man from the suburbs in his mid-thirties and his relationship with his second wife as well as his mother whom he visits on her neglected farm that she stubbornly refuses to leave

Sexual
Morality***Couples*** (1968)

- set in New England, Massachusetts, where the author lived from the 1960s and where he sets his later fiction
- exposes the issues of the evolving sexual politics of the time against the background of East Coast suburbia
- follows a group of ten couples balancing between the Protestant morale and the flexible sexuality of the 1960s
- centres at a dedicated carpenter, Piet Hanoma, who fends off a sense of the void by handling solid materials

Witches
& Satan***The Witches of Eastwick*** (1984), ***The Widows of Eastwick*** (2008)

- the earlier novel of the series mixes the past and the present by making three mischievous suburban divorcees enjoy sexual adventures with Satan, the later book reintroduces the witches and trails them into their old age

Two
Presidents***Memories of the Ford Administration*** (1992)

- contains parallel narratives, one includes observations on sexuality during the Presidency of Gerard Ford in the 1970s, the other consists of a tale of a professor’s research on the nineteenth century President James Buchanan

09/11
Attacks***Terrorist*** (2006)

- responds to the cultural shifts that occurred in the United States after the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001
- centres at an American-born Muslim teenager and seeks to explore the worldviews of religious fundamentalists

Rabbit
PentologyThe Rabbit Pentology: ***Rabbit, Run*** (1960), ***Rabbit Redux*** (1971), ***Rabbit is Rich*** (1981), ***Rabbit at Rest*** (1990), ***Rabbit Remembered*** (2001)

- underlying the series is the magic of the story of Peter Rabbit, a half-rabbit, half-human from children’s books
- each of the books of the pentology maps one decade of American life, following the protagonist until his death
- concentrates on Harry Angstrom, a former local basketball champion, whose nickname Rabbit looks back to those glorious times, to the success that he is unable to recapture when bound by marriage and small-town life
- at the end of the first book Rabbit is confronted with ‘impossible alternatives’, to return to his responsibilities, the pleasures and pressures of the suburbs, to both his wife and mistress, or to follow the road out of the city
- the protagonist sees death either way, he cannot make a choice and so he engages in simple motion and runs, which makes the ending indecisive and evasive, but also implies balancing and existing between the two roads
- the series continues in the protagonist’s separation and reconciliation with his wife in the next book; his inheritance, his wife’s drinking trouble and his son’s school trouble in the following; his retirement and death
- the last book of the series is a novella set after the protagonist’s death and focused on his illegitimate daughter
- both *Rabbit is Rich* and *Rabbit at Rest* won the Pulitzer Prize, the former also won the National Book Award

Bech
TrilogyThe Bech Trilogy: ***Bech: A Book*** (1970), ***Bech is Back*** (1982), ***Bech at Bay*** (1998)

- humorously traces the tribulations of the eponymous protagonist, a moderate Jew and an unsuccessful writer

Hawthorne
RevisedThe *Scarlet Letter* Trilogy: ***A Month of Sundays*** (1975), ***Roger’s Version*** (1986), ***S.*** (1988)

- inspired by the motives of Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), explores the issues of religion and sexuality

Short
Stories***The Same Door*** (1959), ***Pigeon Feathers*** (1962), ***Olinger Stories*** (1964), ***Museums and Women*** (1972), ***Trust Me*** (1987), ***Licks of Love*** (2001), ***My Father’s Tears and Other Stories*** (2009)

- some of his about a dozen published collections of short stories, the latest of them published posthumously

John Cheever (1912–1982)Writing
Subject

- connected for a long time with the *New Yorker*, parted with it as his work grew darker and less simply realistic
- considered the precursor of John Updike, whom he influenced, and with whom he shared the **suburbia** theme

³¹ In Greek mythology, the centaurs are half-humans and half-horses, caught between the two natures both physically and mentally.

Suburbia Disappointment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> undervalued due to his deceptively bright tone, the core of darkness in his stories used to be scarcely taken in appreciated for his powers of social observation, as a cheerful chronicler of suburbia and keen social historian preoccupied with fictional dissections of middle Americans, bends toward a witty satire and mordant moralism examines the theme of the American dream and the mystery of its unfulfilment in his disappointed characters questions why 'in this most prosperous, equitable and accomplished world' everyone seems to be disappointed portrays the suburbs as a state of mind, almost a pastoral utopia that seems cut off from suffering and tragedy presents glimpses of alcoholism, lust and family combat hiding behind the impeccable manners and decorum infuses his stories with much unhappiness, perpetually observes bitterness, disappointment and latent violence makes some of his stories on the other hand shimmer with recollections of summers past and boyhood dreams
Divided Characters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> shows characters as divided souls, schooled in duty and self-restrained, fuelled by lust and passionate longing records the conflicts between sex and marriage, freedom and home, between instinctual need and family life divided between a celebration of the nuclear family and an attraction to the figure of the outlaw and deviant suggests that freedom is a pressing need, but not as strong as the need for family bonds and social acceptance allows for the characters to be redeemed by moments of transcendence in love, nature, language or memory informs his characteristic vein of comic melancholy with a feeling of hope and some promise for the future
Surrealist Tendency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> veers from a level realism towards glimpses of paradise that break through a fog of misery and depression his best stories spin off into sublimity in bursts of poetic gusto with their flow of images and pull to fantasy his later stories grow more surreal and start exploring the terrain of homosexuality³², incarceration or fratricide
Short Stories	<p><i>The Enormous Radio and Other Stories</i> (1953)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the title story deals with a couple whose radio allows them to listen to the conversations of their neighbours
Family Chronicle	<p><i>The Wapshot Chronicle</i> (1957)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> at once a wistful and comic account of a wealthy but declining Massachusetts family, modelled on the author's the scattered storylike episodes combine nostalgia for a lost Eden with the sense of a world gone terribly awry uses his often recurring themes, including his grim sense of Puritan origins, his fierce rivalry with his brother, his parents' painful marriage, his father's feeling of being superfluous and his own fear of turning homosexual
Homosexual Fratricide	<p><i>Falconer</i> (1977)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a controversial novel dealing with an university professor and drug addict who serves a term for the murder of his brother and who struggles to retain his humanity in the prison environment by beginning a homosexual affair
Short Stories	<p><i>The Stories of John Cheever</i> (1978)</p> <p>'Goodbye, My Brother'</p>
Fratricide Theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> contrasts the gloomy puritanical brother with the life-affirming narrator in a story on the Cain and Abel theme the one brother is harsh in his judgements and morosely indifferent to his family and past, the other brother manages to find beauty and rebirth when he is looking out at the sea where his sibling sees only death and decay the narrator extends his tolerance to everyone except his brother, failing to realize how much he resembles him the exasperated narrator murderously strikes his brother from behind, in a sense of expelling him from the family, subduing his own dark alter ego and for a moment restoring the family to a sense of paradise regained
Suburbia Impotence	<p>'The Country Husband'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> focuses on the quiet misery of suburban marriage in a story of a family man who feels he is taken for granted the protagonist survives an air crash but his family is too preoccupied to pay any attention to what happened, he goes on to commit a series of transgressions representing his attempt to regain freedom and the state of joy the protagonist manages to be rude to the town's social arbiter, to blacken the family's standing with its conforming neighbours and to fall in love absurdly with the baby-sitter, feeling that nobody understands him the story concludes with the husband and wife quarrelling and almost separating but reconciling again quickly the title alludes to William Wycherley's farce <i>The Country Wife</i> (1674), in which a man feigns impotence in order to seduce unwary women, but presents a country husband who is really rendered impotent by conventions the husband is trapped in a world which he however chose himself, so in the end he chooses to return back to it
Minor Novella	<p><i>Oh What a Paradise It Seems</i> (1982)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> his last published work, a minor novella focusing on an ageing man who is rejuvenated by an unusual romance
Views on Art	<p>Donald Barthelme (1931–1989)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> allied to the work of art as object, an opaque system of language rather than a transparent account of the world committed to the displacement of the writer from the work and the displacement of the work from the world

³² In his journals the author explores his own anarchic sexual itch, especially homosexual feelings, to which he occasionally yielded.

Pop Art
Methods

- presents his stories and novels as witty, formally elegant and sly commenting on themselves as being **artefacts**
- uses a verbal collage full of odd juxtapositions and unpredictable swerves, a linguistic equivalent of Pop Art
- picks up the shards and **fragments** of modern life, as postmodernists do, and gives them the quality of surprise
- absorbs the trash of common experience, the output of television, books, political speeches and ordinary talk

Playful
Language

- varies narrative modes, moves from parodies of narrative structure to playful lampoons of cultural institutions
- omits or fragments the habitual arrangements and separations of **language** through which we seek to control it
- raises important questions but stubbornly refuses to address them, uses them only as triggers to amusement
- refuses to press for development, which makes the short story a more natural medium for him than the novel
- fluctuates between immersion in trash culture and the impulse to evade it by the means of irony or nostalgia
- appreciated for his sportive fantasy and verbal trickery, though there is also melancholia underlying his work

First
Novel***Snow White*** (1967)

- his first novel, includes a parodic comment on the currently fashionable ideas of the work of art as open and the reader as its co-producer by including a questionnaire for the readers to specify their preferences for a book

Short
Stories***Unspeakable Practices, Unnatural Acts*** (1968)

- a collection of stories, epitomized by the claim of one of the characters, 'fragments are the only forms I trust'
- **'The Balloon'**
- his most widely anthologized story, which may be considered a metaphor for the amorphous nature of his work
- an enormous balloon appears over the city, delightfully random, amorphous, floating free and changing shape
- people argue over its meaning, children play on it, adults write messages on it and authorities try to destroy it
- the ability of the balloon to change shape pleased especially 'people whose lives were rather rigidly patterned', the presence of the balloon generated both pleasure and ruefulness, a wry regret as it floated free over the city
- the balloon is a paradigm of the art object, a free-form product, resistant to understanding or interpretation

Second
Novel***The Dead Father*** (1977)

- his second novel, includes a hilarious passage on the 'true task' of the modern son, which is to reproduce the father, 'but a paler, weaker version of him', to move 'toward a golden age of decency, quiet and calmed fevers'

Joyce Carol Oates (b. 1938)Writing
Styles

- reputed for her great prolificacy, has published over fifty novels and another fifty collections of other writings
- produces novels, short stories, children's books, fiction for young adults, poetry, plays, essays and criticism
- classified as a realist writer and a social critic concerned with the violence of contemporary American culture
- attracted to testing the limits of classical myth, popular tales, fairy stories and established literary conventions
- drawn towards the **Gothic**, blends a realistic treatment of everyday life with horrific and sensational scenes

Writing
Subjects

- the common preoccupation of her fiction, whatever its form or focus, is showing crises and characters at risk
- focuses on ordinary characters whose lives are vulnerable to threats from society or their inner selves or both
- her characters either find **violence** erupting from their surroundings, or they feel so frustrated by the barren or grotesque nature of their lives and their social circumstances that they eventually erupt into violence themselves
- portrays characters as victims of forces beyond their control or comprehension, though they may not realize it
- sets many of her novels in 'Eden County', a location based on the area of New York State where she was born
- her early fiction focuses on rural America with its migrants, social strays, ragged prophets and wrecking yards
- her later writing moves to satirical meditations on suburbia and to exploring the brutal lives of the urban poor

Early
Novels***With Shuddering Fall*** (1964)

- her first published novel, concentrates on a disastrous love affair of one couple in the setting of rural America

A Garden of Earthly Delights³³ (1967)

- her second novel, shows a woman protagonist determined to escape her haphazard life of violence and poverty and her relationships with her father, a bitter migrant farm worker, with her wealthy married lover and her son

Expensive People (1968)

- her next novel, abandons the rural setting in favour of a city, satirizes the mediocre lives of suburbia dwellers

Master-
piece***them***³⁴ (1969)

- winner of the National Book Award, explores the struggle of the working class to achieve the American Dream

Short
Story***'Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?'*** (1970)

- a much anthologized story, shows an all American³⁵ girl fatally at ease with the blandness of her young life,

³³ The title alludes to a painting by Hieronymus Bosch called *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (c. 1504), a triptych on Biblical scenes.

³⁴ The title is styled with lower-case letters.

Later Novels	whose sense of security proves a dangerous illusion as she becomes a victim of a caller mistaken for a friend <i>Wonderland</i> (1971)
Generation Gaps	• a novel about the gaps between generations, structured around the stories of Lewis Carroll's children's books <i>Childwold</i> (1976)
Hopeless Love	• a lyrical portrait of the artist as a young woman, a story of a middle-aged man falling in love with a young girl • the title refers to the name of the fictional distant and impoverished region to which the man feels attracted <i>You Must Remember This</i> (1987)
Red Scare	• commemorates the conspiratorial obsessions of the 1950s and the Red Scare as triggered off by the Cold War <i>Because it is Bitter, and Because it is My Heart</i> (1991)
American Racism	• dramatizes the explosive nature of American race relations, set before the upsurge of the civil rights movement <i>Black Water</i> (1992)
Love Affair	• a powerful novella, examines the fatal attraction of a young girl for an older man, referred to as 'The Senator'
Marilyn Monroe	<i>Blonde</i> (2000) • an extended novel, plunges into the internal life of Marilyn Monroe, though insists on being a work of fiction

³⁵ 'All-Americans' refer to the members of a honorary sports team, the best amateur players of a given season for each team position.

(8) Minimalism and the New Lost Generation

Raymond Carver, Tobias Wolff, Ann Beattie, David Leavitt,
Bret Easton Ellis, Tama Janowitz, Jay McInerney

Minimalism

- Minimalism in Arts • a movement associated with the post-WWII development in Western culture, prominent in the 1960s to 1970s
- primarily refers to the visual arts whose reductivist methods pushed avant-garde modernism to a new extreme
- prominent in literature in the **1980s**, a decade later former minimalists became established writers on their own
- contrasts with the 1960s obscurity and allusiveness in its compression, lucidity and technical craftsmanship
- differs from experimental postmodernism in its simplicity, though not on the account of richness in meaning
- shifts away from experimentalism as a goal in itself toward realist depth and previously ignored points of view
- Minimalism in Literature • a matter-of-fact prose style stripped down to its most fundamental features, discarding everything superfluous
- recognizable for its 'equanimity of surface', ordinary subjects treated by neutral narrators in a very brief scope
- characterized by economy with words, focus on surface description, eschewing adverbs and other modifiers
- tends to **unexceptional** characters in unexceptional situations, keeps a psychological distance from the subject
- gives voice to a new underclass of silences peoples in the cities, mostly workers, women or ethnic minorities
- expects the readers to take an active role in creating the story, prefers allowing context to dictate the meaning
- brought a flowering of the short story, perhaps symptomatic of the reading public's dwindling attention span

The New Lost Generation

- Disillusioned 1970s • the concept was introduced by David Leavitt in his autobiographical essay 'The New Lost Generation' (1985)
- refers to the generation of people born in the 1960s, who experienced the **1970s** as teenagers or young adults
- claims that they belong in part to the 1960s, in part to the 1980s but sit uncomfortably somewhere in between
- explains they were born too late to take part in the rebellious 1960s and too soon to enjoy the consuming 1980s
- characterizes his generation as defying definition, as marked by estrangement, loneliness and **disillusionment**
- admits that his generation may be characterless, but by choice, based on the failure of the preceding generation

Dirty Realism

- Naturalism Revived • associated with figures like Raymond Carver, Tobias Wolff, Richard Ford, Harry Crews or Bobbie Ann Mason
- features tough characters, elliptical dialogue and uncompromising approach to violent and unsavoury subjects
- eschews slick metropolitanism in favour of rural American and often inarticulate, unsophisticated protagonists
- seeks to articulate the lives of the **working poor** who have to sell their labour or even their bodies in order to survive and who might at any time lose everything, including the basic dignities that make human beings human

The Literary 'Brat Pack'

- 1980s Iconoclasts • the label was used to characterize the young writers in the **mid-1980s** who were to represent the new face of literature, young, fresh and iconoclastic, and who included Bret Easton Ellis, Tama Janowitz and Jay McInerney
- owed a debt to the earlier minimalists, used similarly clear and often dispassionate ways of rendering modern anxiety and angst that represented a break from the linguistically heavy and polite fiction of the older generation
- associated also with the 'blank generation', writers whose characters existed in a state of anomie, in a deadpan consumer culture of empty television shows, semi-disposable Swedish furniture, fast food and designer labels
- represented the dislocation of the **city gilded youth** suffering from an environment that utterly swamped them
- popularized laconic and cynical style and preoccupation with the decadent values of a materialistic generation

Raymond Carver (1938–1988)

- Style & Subjects • author of condensed, terse and toughly graceful stories, reminiscent in some of their methods of **Hemingway**
- successfully employs omissions, the spaces between the words to give a sense of evanescent, elusive feelings
- deals with people living on the fringe of subsistence and articulation, makes audible the apparently inarticulate
- cleaves to the stark surfaces and simple rituals of everyday life, clings to the concrete, avoids any abstractions
- addresses the urban vernaculars and blends them by focusing on slight plots and elliptical dramatic conflicts
- describes emotions, disappointments and dissolving relationships with a deadpan simplicity and quiet stoicism
- combines weariness with wonder, acknowledgement of the cruelty of life with an occasional moment of relief

Short Stories • **Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?** (1976), **What We Talk About When We Talk About Love** (1981), **Cathedral** (1984), **Where I'm Calling From** (1988) • short story collections

Poetry ***Winter Insomnia* (1970), *At Night the Salmon Move* (1976), *When Water Comes Together with Other Water* (1985), *Ultramarine* (1987) • poetry collections**

Tobias Wolff (b. 1945)

- Experiences • spent four years as a paratrooper in **Vietnam**, then received his education at Oxford and Stanford Universities
 • served as a reporter for the *Washington Post*, subsequently became a university lecturer and writer at residence
 • has published short stories, novellas and autobiographical writing, edited several anthologies of short stories
- Writing • skilfully depicts many voices and a wide range of emotions, though his preoccupation are male characters
 • both his fiction and non-fiction writing is characterized by an exploration of the personal and existential terrain
 • his protagonists often face moral dilemmas, unable to reconcile what they know with what they feel to be true
- Short Stories ***In the Garden of North American Martyrs* (1981; UK title, *Hunters in the Snow*, 1982), *Back in the World* (1985), *The Night in Question* (1996)**
 • short story collections, the latest includes many stories reflecting the author's experience in the Vietnam War
- Army Novella ***The Barracks Thief* (1985)**
 • a novella with a remarkable narrative structure, including several successive shifts of tone and point of view
 • focuses on a group of three fresh paratrooper training graduates who are temporarily attached to an airborne infantry company, awaiting orders to report to Vietnam, and who are treated as outsiders by the experienced men
 • the newcomers become suspects when money and personal property is discovered missing from the barracks
- Boyhood Memoir ***This Boy's Life* (1989)**
 • a harrowing memoir of his upbringing following his parents' divorce and his long separation from his brother³⁶
 • spent his boyhood alone with his mother until she remarried a man who was to become an abusive stepfather
 • his brother meanwhile lived in the custody of their biological father, the brothers were reunited only years later
- Vietnam Memoir ***In Pharaoh's Army: Memories of the Lost War* (1994)**
 • a memoir about his service in Vietnam, including an account of the Tet Offensive during which he was present
 • also includes his other experiences prior to becoming a writer, personal vignettes set in and out of Vietnam

Ann Beattie (b. 1947)

- Writing Subjects • appreciated for her keen, precise observations of suburban middle-class life and her dry, matter-of-fact irony
 • preoccupied with chronicling the disillusionments of the middle-class generation that grew up in the 1960s
 • her characters, having **come of age in the 1960s**, often have difficulties adjusting to the later cultural values
 • the characters are often alienated, passive, unable to extricate themselves from unsatisfying careers and lives
 • her early work attempts little examination of motivation, but later the depth of her characters tends to increase
- Novels ***Chilly Scenes of Winter* (1976)**
 • her first novel, presents a frustrated and bewildered figure of a lonely man in his twenties who yearns for love
 • documents the fate of the 1960s idealism as the 'Woodstock generation' settles into comfortable middle age
- Loneliness ***Falling in Place* (1980)**
 • her second novel, depicts the loveless marriage of a forty-year-old advertising executive, set in the late 1970s
 • chronicles the breakdown of a conventional American marriage as seen largely through the eyes of the children
- Loveless Marriage ***Love Always* (1985)**
 • an account of the world of contemporary media, dealing with a writer about love who is deserted by her lover
 • combines a careful realistic attention to descriptive and thematic details with a satirical strain of black humour
- Deserted Writer ***Picturing Will* (1990)**
 • renders a special situation in the life of the five-year-old Will, whose mother goes to work as a photographer when deserted by the boy's father, now remarried to another woman, and is having a romance with a new man
- Deserted Mother ***Distortions* (1976), *Secrets and Surprises* (1978), *The Burning House* (1982), *Where You'll Find Me* (1986)**
 • collections of short stories, frequently appearing in magazines, including the *New Yorker* or *Atlantic Monthly*

David Leavitt (b. 1961)

- Gay Writing • a homosexual author, gay life in the post-AIDS world often surfaces as a theme or sub-plot in his short fiction
 • a representative of an emergent narrative genre in the 1980s, **gay men's** coming-of-age or growing-up novels³⁷

³⁶ His elder brother, Geoffrey Wolff, also wrote an autobiographical book about his difficult boyhood, *The Duke of Deception* (1979).

- concentrates on complicated family relationships, besides homosexuality often employs the motifs of cancer
- Short Stories** *Family Dancing* (1984), *A Place I've Never Been Before* (1990)
- collections of short stories, evocative studies of modern American family life, established him as a minimalist
- Novels** *The Lost Language of Cranes* (1986)
- his first novel, deals with the tormented relationship of a father and son, both discovering their homosexuality
- Gay Father & Son**
- shows the son in accord with the conventions of the 1980s gay fiction, breaks new ground in the depiction of the father, a middle-aged married man coming to terms with his sexual nature and seeking advice from his son
 - the title derives from a child mentioned in the novel who emulated the screeching of cranes rather than speech
- Family Themes** *Equal Affections* (1989)
- examines the theme of homosexuality and the family, presenting one of the leading characters as a lesbian girl
- While England Sleeps* (1993)
- the original version of the novel included an episode so resembling one in the life of the British poet Stephen Spender that Spender sued the author for plagiarizing his memoir and had the book removed from book shops

Bret Easton Ellis (b. 1965)

- Writing Style**
- regarded a representative of **transgressive** art, a form aimed to outrage or violate basic mores and sensibilities
 - uses an extensive cast of characters, makes some of them recur throughout his writing in major or minor roles
 - most of his writing was adapted into film versions, notably his first three novels and the short story collection
- Yuppie Novels** *Less Than Zero*³⁸ (1985)
- his first novel, an initiation tale of a young man trapped in his own alienation, set in a bleak modern landscape
 - portrays the disaffected youth in affluent society in the 1980s, preoccupied with drugs, casual sex and money
- College Students** *Rules of Attraction* (1987)
- explores the psychological traumas and sexual promiscuity of a group of middle-class liberal college students
 - focuses primarily on three students, two boys and one girl, who find themselves in an entangled love triangle
 - narrated in the first person, told from the point of view of various characters, both the major ones and minor
- Serial Killer** *American Psycho* (1991)
- an unnerving journey into the mind of a serial killer, Patrick Bateman, otherwise a yuppie³⁹ Wall Street banker
 - rejected by the author's publisher for its excessive violence and supposed misogyny, but published by another
 - blurs the distinction between genre and literature, wants to be sensationalistic and serious at the same moment
 - both criticizes commodity culture and is itself contained in it in representing a cartoonishly materialistic figure
 - contains a surfeit of violence and horror, an obsession with commodity fetishism but also a knowing use of the narrator, for it is never clear to the reader whether the killer who tells his story is recording facts or fantasizing
- Short Stories** *The Informers* (1994)
- a collection of short stories linked by characters inhabiting the same universe, covering much the same territory as the preceding novels in vignettes of various wayward figures, ranging from rock stars to vampires

Tama Janowitz (b. 1957)

- Writing Subjects**
- born in San Francisco, educated in New York, where she settled and which she uses as the setting of her fiction
 - satirically comments on the freaks and fakes who inhabit the sprawling metropolis of **social non-achievement**
 - employs a unique farcical voice in her biting prose, seeks to find balance between insight and social criticism
 - eschews political statements, but addresses the issues of feminism, racism, capitalism and cultural imperialism
- Growing-up Novel** *American Dad* (1981)
- her first novel, an ironic growing-up story of a slightly misanthropic young boy who lives in the shadow of his father, a psychiatrist and reputed ladies' man, and unsuccessfully tries to escape his father's admonishing glare
- Short Stories** *Slaves of New York* (1986)
- a collection of short stories telling in the manner of the collective history a variety of stories of young artists, writers and film-makers whose failing lives are determined by the expense and confusion of living in Manhattan
 - portrays a society of egos shackled by their own modish attitudes and their highly artificial social environment

³⁷ Gay growing-up novels depict a central character's development through or against the structure of a story we colloquially call 'coming out', showing self-affirmation and self-definition through the realization that the narrator's experience is shared by others.

³⁸ The title comes from a song by the Elvis Costello (b. 1954), associated with the fashionable mid-1970s New Wave musical genre.

³⁹ Yuppies, standing for Young Urban Professionals, were an emerging class of the 1980s; typically wealthy young people who showed off their wealth by purchasing exclusively designer products and paying exaggerated attention to their looks and bodies.

Exploitation Novel

A Cannibal in Manhattan (1987)

- a black comedy, an ambitious portrayal of the absurdities of metropolitan life in presenting a cannibal chief visiting the wilder shores of America, Manhattan, who was brought by sponsors to America only to be exploited
- the protagonist is cheated at every turn, unwittingly implicated in a horrendous crime and abandoned by his erstwhile sponsors so that the distinctly unmythical savage slides towards vagrancy and a fondness for drinking
- creates a threatening world of betrayal and treachery, underpinned with the alternative of drunken camaraderie

Discrimination Novel

The Male Cross-Dresser Support Group (1992)

- a novel offering her familiar mix of farcical incident, wry observation and lurid description of low-life scenes
- culminates in a car chase across America with the female protagonist accompanied by a boy dressed as a girl
- suggests through the fictional story that being a male affords greater privileges in society than being a female

Jay McInerney (b. 1955)

Novels

- produces novels with autobiographical elements, though struggles against the image of **himself as a character**

Bright Lights, Big City⁴⁰ (1984)

Cocaine Parties

- a novel written in the second person narrative, unique in its time for its detailed portrayal of cocaine subculture
- the nameless protagonist is strongly autobiographical, like the author also the character is a writer who works as a fact-checker for a high-brow magazine, while by night the character turns into a cocaine user and party goer
- the protagonist is left by his wife, who was tempted away by a modelling career, he seeks to lose himself in the party scene but ends up looking for her at fashion events and worshipping every item that she owned in their flat
- the novel became the inspiration for a film of the same name (1988) and later an off-Broadway musical (1999)

Karate Learner

Ransom (1985)

- a novel following the eponymous protagonist who settles in Kyoto and seriously immerses himself in karate because he hopes that it will transform his life and enable him to regain control, but is caught up by his past life

Party Girl

Story of My Life (1988)

- a novel narrated in the first person from the point of view of the young female protagonist, described as a 'sexually voracious' party goer and cocaine addict, who moves to Manhattan and aspires to become an actress
- implies that her behaviour is a response to her father's abuse, including his murder of her prize jumping horse

College Couple

Brightness Falls (1992)

- a novel focused on a couple who meet at a college, gives a richly detailed panorama of the New York City life

⁴⁰ The title is taken from a 1961 blues song by Jimmy Reed, representative of the electric blues, which he brought to the mainstream.

(9) Jewish American Authors

Isaac Bashevis Singer, Bernard Malamud, Saul Bellow, Philip Roth

Jewish Immigrants

Refugees
from
Pogroms

- immigration from Europe to the United States increased dramatically during and after the Second World War
- despite restrictions imposed by a conservative political administration, many of the immigrants were Jewish
- Jews were chased out of their homes in Europe by pogroms, the first wave at the turn of the twentieth century
- most Jews came from **Eastern Europe**, for anti-Communist sentiments made refugees from this area welcome
- immigrants were welcome if they were refugees from Communism but often unwelcome if they were Jewish

Jewish
American
Ghettos

- Jewish immigrants joined the already established communities that retained their allegiance to the old culture
- Jews brought with themselves both Hebrew, the language of the Bible, and Yiddish, the language of everyday
- Jews inclined to socialist ideologies because of their sympathies with the poor and suffering, like themselves
- Jewish refugees from war brought their own special freight of haunting memories of the war and **Holocaust**
- the shocking news of Holocaust were not easily accepted in America, it did not feel the WWII on its territory
- the facts of Holocaust created in the Jewish community in America acute feelings of guilt for having survived

Isaac Bashevis Singer (1904–1991)

Yiddish
Writer

- immigrated to the United States from Poland (1935), became a journalist writing in Yiddish for a Jewish paper
- wrote in **Yiddish** and then edited his writings for their American versions, referred to them as second originals
- deals with Polish Jews, their traditional faith and folkways, their daily village life, their mysticism and sexuality
- appreciated for his remarkable blending of irony, wit and wisdom, flavoured with the occult and the grotesque
- received the Nobel Prize (1978), praised especially for his autobiographical book *In My Father's Court* (1966)

Pogrom
Novel

***Satan in Goray* (1935)**

- his first major work, appeared first in Yiddish and twenty years later in English, about the aftermath of a Polish pogrom in the seventeenth century, when the survivors turned to a messianic sect with erotic and mystic beliefs

Polish Jews
Novel

***The Family Muskata* (1950)**

- his first work in English, a naturalistic portrayal of the decline of a Jewish family in Warsaw before the WWII

Family
Chronicles

***The Magician of Lublin* (1960), *The Manor* (1967), *The Estate* (1969)**

- novels set in Poland, family chronicles employing a large cast of characters and extending over generations
- record the changes in and eventual break ups of large Jewish families affected by secularism and assimilation

Short
Stories

***Gimpel the Fool* (1957), *The Spinoza of Market Street* (1961), *A Crown of Feathers* (1973)**

- collections of short stories about the ghetto life of Polish Jews, the last mentioned won a National Book Award

American
Masterpiece

***Enemies: A Love Story* (1972)**

- his first novel to be set in the United States, creates a kind of post-Holocaust trilogy with the following novels
- the author did not experience Holocaust first-hand but he lived with refugees from this ordeal for many years
- in each of the three novels the Jewish characters try to exorcise the millions of ghosts created by the genocide
- the novels are marked by a comic absurdism of tone, carnivalesque nihilism of spirit and mad mordant humour
- the above deals with a refugee shuttling between his mistress, his American wife and his European wife, whom he thought dead, careering between the challenges of his American present and the ordeals of his European past
- the protagonist encounters postwar culture as a mildly deranged survivor who is trapped in wartime memories, he suspects trauma and disruption everywhere, he cannot reconcile the Holocaust with his American experience
- the novel ends up with the mistress committing suicide and the husband setting up a home with both his wives

Europe
Return

***The Penitent* (1983)**

- the novel follows a reverse journey in which the protagonist leaves 'the Golden Land' of America for Europe

Forgiving
Gesture

***Meshugah*⁴¹ (1994)**

- the narrator of the novel marries in a muted gesture of forgiveness a woman who collaborated with the Nazis
- the title of the novel reflects the feeling expressed by one character that 'the whole world is an insane asylum'

Bernard Malamud (1914–1986)

Writing
Style

- born in New York to Russian immigrants, received college education, taught at a land-grant college in Oregon
- his language is influenced by Hebrew and Yiddish, his English came to be called **Ameridish** or Yinglish⁴²

⁴¹ The title is a Yiddish word for 'crazy, senseless, insane'.

⁴² For instance in Leo Rosten's playful linguistics book *The Joys of Yiddish* (1968).

- his writings are parables, fables full of historical specificity and personal detail but also placeless and timeless
- preoccupied with a painful progress from immaturity to maturity, becoming a hero entering into lives of others
- tends to introduce characters as travelling in quest of a new life, equipped with some distinct personal abilities
- the characters have no faith in anything until they experience an involuntary involvement in the lives of others
- the coming of age is signalled by the acceptance or refusal of one's responsibilities in service to other people
- the process of maturing is accompanied by inevitable **suffering**, it is up to the characters if they make it count

***The Natural* (1952)**

Baseball
Novel

- his first novel, introduces the author's preoccupation with suffering as a means bringing people to happiness
- the story deals with baseball as a realm of American heroism and myth and with the role of success in sports
- the talented protagonist is threatened by a killer seeking to become famous by killing the best baseball players

***The Assistant* (1957)**

Conversion
Novel

- concerned with an Italian American, Frank Alpine, who becomes an assistant to a Brooklyn Jewish shopkeeper after robbing his barely surviving grocery and trying to make up for the damage by working for the poor owner
- the assistant gets close with the owner's daughter, takes over the shop after his death and converts to Judaism

***The Magic Barrel* (1958), *Idiots First* (1963)**

Short
Stories

- collections of short stories, both named for their title stories, the first mentioned won the National Book Award
- 'The Magic Barrel' focuses on the unlikely relationship of an unmarried rabbinic student and the suffering daughter of a colourful marriage broker, who are brought together by their mutual need for love and salvation

***A New Life* (1961)**

Semi-auto-
biography

- a semi-autobiographical novel on a Jewish professor of English who goes to teach in an Oregon 'cow college'

***The Fixer* (1967)**

Master-
piece

- based on actual events of 1913, realistically describes a Russian Jew who is falsely accused of and imprisoned for ritual murder, turns into magical realism as it follows his escape from prison and the assassination of the czar
- the title refers to the Jew's occupation as a handyman; the book won the Pulitzer and the National Book Prize

***Pictures of Fidelman* (1969)**

Short
Stories

- a collection of short stories telling the story of a middle-aged Bronx resident who goes to Italy to be an artist
- his third collection seeks to make free of his formerly often oblique allegories set in dreamlike urban ghettos

***Dubin's Lives* (1974)**

Later
Novels

- a novel focusing on a middle-aged biographer and his own as well as his subjects' marriages and love affairs

***God's Grace* (1982)**

Dystopia

- his last book, a pseudo-Biblical tale about a Jewish man who is the sole survivor of a nuclear war, succeeds in converting the surviving apes and has a female ape deliver a half-ape half-Jew who plants a new civilization

Saul Bellow (1915–2005)

Writing
Styles

- his parents emigrated from Russia first to Canada, then to the United States, he grew up in a Jewish household
- seeks to be a historian of **civilization** as well as **consciousness**, that is to find a balance between the novel of information, with its occupation with externals, things, process and documentation, and the novel of sensibility
- his first two novels gravitate towards the condition of nightmare, then he adopts an extrovert picaresque form
- his late novels tend to be darker in tenor and tone, but still insist on the integrity of knowledge of what is what
- his latest works often present Jewish intellectuals whose interior monologues range from the sublime to the absurd, but whose exterior world is peopled by incorrigible realists who act as a corrective to their speculations
- received the Nobel Prize (1976), the Pulitzer Prize (1976) for *Humboldt's Gift* and three National Book Awards

***Dangling Man* (1944)**

Novels

- his first novel, on a man caught between the life around and within him as he waits for induction into the army

***The Victim* (1947)**

Jew &
Gentile

- a novel about the agonizing relationship between a Jew and Gentile, who despite their radical differences seem to be 'dependent for the food of spiritual life' upon each other and who become each other's victim of the title

***The Adventures of Augie March* (1953)**

Picaresque
Masterpiece

- the title protagonist is a larger-than-life mythic hero pursuing his search for identity through several countries
- attempts to define the right relationship between the self and the society in dramatizing two extremes, an elder brother who is a social success at the expense of brutalizing himself and a younger who is a helpless pure spirit
- the protagonist chooses to manoeuvre between the fixities of the social world and the inertia of the isolated self, to find his freedom in movement, expressing the hope that civilization and consciousness can be squared

Failure Novella	<i>Seize the Day</i> (1956) • an exceptional novella, unique in its treatment of a failure in a society where the only success is success only
Picaresque Novel	<i>Henderson the Rain King</i> (1959) • continues the picaresque approach in the tale following an eccentric American millionaire on a quest in Africa
Introspective Masterpiece	<i>Herzog</i> (1964) • the novel returns to a more introspective and meditative form in presenting the narrator, Moses Herzog, as a person of divided mind, caught between the isolated ambit of consciousness and the teeming surfaces of society • the protagonist feels driven out of the world by the 'Reality-Instructors' who would shape him in his own image, his second wife, his mistress and his brother, but also realizes the destructiveness of lonely consciousness • dangles between pride and humility, assertion and mockery, declaration of power and confession of impotence • remains convinced of the possibility of resolution, ends up with a sense of peace and promise outside language
Holocaust Survivor	<i>Mr Sammler's Planet</i> (1970) • the novel regards the possibility of the collapse of civilization, features as the protagonist a Holocaust survivor
Pulitzer Winner	<i>Humboldt's Gift</i> (1975) • present a story of personal and social crisis through the relationship of an ambitious writer and a visionary poet
Social Orders	<i>The Dean's December</i> (1982) • places the autobiographical central character between two social orders, the decaying Communism of Eastern Europe and the anarchic capitalism of the United States, both as equally repellent and violating the human spirit • records the decline of Western society into barbarism and the inability of the individual to prevent the fall
Later Novels	<i>More Die of Heartbreak</i> (1987), <i>A Theft</i> (1989), <i>The Actual</i> (1997) • the novels develop character rather than action and continue exploring the conflicts of the ideal and the actual
Old Men's Friendship	<i>Ravelstein</i> (2000) • his last novel presents a fictional version of the life of teacher and philosopher Allan Bloom, aka Ravelstein • follows the friendship of two university professors and the complications that animate their intimate and intellectuals attachments in the face of impending death of Ravelstein who asks his friend to write his memoir
Philip Roth (b. 1933)	
Writing Subjects	• his writing concentrates on Jewish middle-class life and the painful entanglements of sexual and familial love • his early novels follow protagonists who attempt to escape from the narrative of the Jewish family and culture, who look longing at the 'goyim' and their world, free from the orthodox restrictions of traditional Jewish law • his later novels explore the mirage of identity and the use of writing to reflect selfhood as well as nationhood • the Zuckerman novels in particular concentrate not simply on personal identity but on the identity of America • his writing gazes at the image of an American like himself in order to discover what lies beneath the surface, shows his characters inclining towards the idea that selfhood is a fiction, a product of the dreaming imagination • his most recent work is increasingly concerned with mortality and with the failure of the ageing body and mind
Novella & Short Stories	<i>Goodbye, Columbus</i> ⁴³ (1959) • his first book, besides the title novella contains also five short stories, including 'The Conversion of the Jews', 'Defender of the Faith' or 'Eli, the Fanatic', all about later generation Jews leaving the ghettos of their parents • the title story is set in Newark, New Jersey, which is his favourite setting, and deals with an intelligent Jewish graduate working in a low paying position in a library and his love affair with an assimilated wealthy Jewish girl
Novels	<i>Letting Go</i> (1962) • his first novel, about the psychologically crippling effects of being raised constrained to the family nest, or trap
Masturbat- ion Fantasy	<i>Portnoy's Complaint</i> (1969) • an audacious satirical portrait of a Jewish man experiencing a clash of his ethical impulses and sexual longings • the novel is constituted by a manic monologue of the narrator, Alexander Portnoy, to his helpless psychiatrist • Portnoy is drowning in his own subjectivity as determined by other people, his family, community and culture, he tries to find relief in obsessive masturbation and masturbatory monologue only to deepen his own entrapment
Becoming a Breast	<i>The Breast</i> (1972) • a minor novella whose protagonist turns into a breast and struggles between the rational and the bodily desires
First Zuckerman	The First Zuckerman Trilogy: <i>The Ghost Writer</i> (1979), <i>Zuckerman Unbound</i> (1981), <i>The Anatomy Lesson</i> (1983)

⁴³ The title refers to the city of Columbus, the site of the Ohio State University, where the girl's brother becomes a successful athlete.

- the three books were printed together with the novella *The Prague Orgy*⁴⁴ (1985) as *Zuckerman Bound* (1985)
- follow the life and career of an aspiring young writer, Nathan Zuckerman, very much resembling Roth himself

Philip
Roth

***Operation Shylock: A Confession* (1993)**

- features a narrator called Philip Roth who travels to Israel to attend the trial of a war criminal and at the same time pursues his impersonator who appropriated his identity and used his celebrity to spread anti-Semitic ideas

The Second
Zuckerman

The Second Zuckerman Trilogy: ***American Pastoral*** (1997), ***I Married a Communist*** (1998), ***The Human Stain*** (2000)

- the first book tries to tell the story of a man whom Zuckerman sees as an archetypal American but tells the story of his nation, attempts to be 'a realistic chronicle' but ends up with the pastoral myth invented for America
- suggests that the pastoral reflects the longing for freedom, a pure subjective space that is claimed for America
- follows the story of a middle-class couple whose daughter becomes a terrorist; won the Pulitzer Prize (1998)
- the second book shows the rise and fall of a Communist man who is brought down by his family and society
- the last book has Zuckerman tell the story of a light-skinned black man who passed all his life as a white Jew

Alternative
History

***The Plot Against America* (2004)**

- the novel develops a counterhistorical story of the rise fascism and anti-Semitism in America during the WWII

Ageing
& Dying

***Everyman* (2006)**

- the novel examines illness and death, taking its title from the fifteenth century English morality play on death

***Exit Ghost* (2007)**

- the novel revisits Zuckerman who awakes to life's possibilities after more than a decade in self-imposed exile

***The Humbling* (2007)**

- the novel follows an ageing actor who realizes he has lost his talent for acting and finds himself unable to work

⁴⁴ The novella follows Zuckerman on his journey to Prague in the 1970s in search of the lost manuscript of a martyred Jewish writer.

(10) Southern Literature after 1945

William Faulkner, William Styron, Truman Capote, Flannery O'Connor, Eudora Welty

Views of the American South

- Position of the South
- Fred Chappell: the canon of the American literature ought to be cracked open to receive the Southerners, they ought not to be considered a mere curiosity and approached in terms of regional rather than American literature
 - Elizabeth Spencer: the South is still exceptional for its history, weather and nature, sense of family, variety of population, but it is now being formed by the experience of the whole nation and is no more an independent unit
 - Richard Ford: the label of a Southerner it **too restrictive**, it sets a barrier between the author and the audience
 - the South constitutes a particular cultural and social unit within the United States, with emphasis on traditional **moral values**⁴⁵, the traumatic but inspiring heritage of slavery and loss suffered in the Civil War (1861–1865)
 - most Southern writers refuse to be restrained by their region but still draw on it with a mixture of love and hate

Southern Literature in Overview

- Humorists
- **Southwestern Humorists**: geographically in the Deep South⁴⁶, included Augustus Baldwin Longstreet (1790–1870), George Washington Harris (1814–1869), Thomas Bangs Thorpe (1815–1875), Mark Twain (1835–1910)
 - tall tale: originally a frontier anecdote of violent exaggeration or understatement told in the vernacular idiom, presents improbable incidents with solemn face lying and rough humour, producing the effects of the grotesque
- Fugitive Agrarians
- the Southern Renaissance: an unprecedented concentration of intellectuals and creative minds in the relatively poor agricultural region, came to flourish in the 1920s to 1930s, called alternately '**Renascence**' by Southerners
 - the **Fugitive Agrarians**⁴⁷: the spiritual fathers of the Southern Renaissance, centred at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, published the collection *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (1930)
 - Allen Tate (1899–1979): a Fugitive Agrarian, literary critic, essayist, poet of the 'Ode to the Confederate Dead' (1926), author of the novel called *The Fathers* (1938), dealing with the complex racial relationships in the South
 - Robert Penn Warren (1905–1989): a Fugitive Agrarian, essayist, poet and novelist, author of the political novel set in the South *All the King's Men* (1946), which is often regarded to mark the end of the Southern Renaissance
- New Critics
- the **New Critics**: evolved from the Fugitives, argued for literary interpretation through close reading, included Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, John Crowe Ransom (1888–1974), Cleanth Brooks (1906–1990) and others
 - influenced the following generation of writers because they acted as university tutors to many of them and also contributed to the inclusion of European and in particular **British literature** to the syllabi of South's universities
 - Eudora Welty: wrote her dissertation thesis on the poetry of William Butler Yeats, makes his poem 'Leda and the Swan' figure in her short stories of *The Golden Apples* (1949), for instance in the story entitled 'Sir Rabbit'
 - Lewis Nordan: wrote his thesis on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, which significantly influenced his own fiction
 - Fred Chappell: inspired by Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, to whose structure and themes he keeps on returning
 - Richard Ford: influenced by the work of the French realists and especially naturalists of the nineteenth century

Contemporary Tendencies

- Writing Modes
- traditional psychological realism with aspects of local colour: Eudora Welty, Peter Taylor, Elizabeth Spenser
 - dirty realism, later called also **new realism**, influenced by the minimalism of Raymond Carver: Richard Ford
 - the subject of impoverished people, mentally and materially, influenced by Erskine Caldwell: Harry Crews
 - **K-Mart realism**, focused on uneducated working-class characters leading consumer lives: Bobbie Ann Mason
 - womanism, the African American branch of feminism, focused on the integrity of both sexes: Alice Walker
 - postmodernism, in its Southern form including a sense of the moral dimension: John Barth, Cormac McCarthy
 - **growing-up** novel and **genre literature**, horror, detective story, western, sci-fi: Fred Chappell, Lewis Nordan

Southern Gothic

- Aims & Ways
- inspired by the nineteenth century British Gothic novel, develops the lines of **paranoia, barbarism and taboo**
 - the American Gothic writing focuses on the exploration of one's internal life and the horrors of consciousness
 - the Southern Gothic shows the different ways that the characters take when trying to come to terms with the disappearing faith and dissolving moral values and to find their new identity in the unstable and uncertain world
 - offers a new way of dealing with the traditional topics of the family, community, death, religious faith and past
 - shows cruelty and violence, uses the motifs of uprooting, degeneration, incest, flight to the North from the past

⁴⁵ Typically those of conservative Protestantism; the region is known as the **Bible Belt**, labelled so first by Henry Louis Mencken.

⁴⁶ Includes Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina; sometimes Arkansas and Tennessee are also included.

⁴⁷ Called themselves Agrarians in reference to their views, later became Fugitives for their magazine *The Fugitive* (1922–1925).

Grotesque Elements

- often employs the **grotesque**, the mixing of the comic and the tragic, and emotional distance or even cynicism
- seeks to **shock** the audience and through the shock make them realize the difference between the good and evil
- representatives of the genre include Flannery O'Connor, Lewis Nordan, also Eudora Welty and Fred Chappell

William Faulkner (1897–1962)

Biography & Influences

- born William Falkner but changed the spelling of his last name (1918), which he explained by various stories
- lived in Oxford, Lafayette County, Mississippi, on which he modelled his fictional Jefferson, **Yoknapatawpha**
- grew up with the legends and stories about his ancestors, the family and the past; his great-grandfather was an influential public figure and a colonel in the Confederate Army, he became the model for Colonel John Sartoris
- influenced by the **tall tale**, as seen in his growing-up stories *The Unvanquished* (1938) and *The Reivers* (1962)
- dropped out of high school distressed by his childhood sweetheart's marriage, she later divorced to marry him
- tried to enlist in the army but was too short, eventually enlisted and served with the Royal Air Force in Canada
- enrolled as a veteran and special student at the University of Mississippi (1919), dropped out after three terms
- moved to New Orleans, underwent a series of odd jobs, met Sherwood Anderson, who encouraged his writing
- supported himself by producing Hollywood scripts, as *To Have and Have Not* (1945) or *The Big Sleep* (1946)

Southern Subjects

- appreciated deeply the American South and the South's history, believed the native soil is worth writing about
- occupied with a single imaginary country but within it he managed to explore the whole of human experience
- aimed at an imaginative recovery of the South, sought to know it as a region and to chart also its spiritual map
- populated his fictional Yoknapatawpha County with representatives of all the social classes and ethnic groups
- illustrated on the fate of several families the rise and decline of the **Southern aristocracy** and society based on slavery, heroism and foolishness of the Confederation supporters and the changing moral climate in the region
- concerned with the complexities of familial, sexual, social and racial identities and with the burden of the past
- believed in the interpenetration of **past and present**, claimed that any identity is indelibly stamped by history

Writing Techniques

- tended to interpret writing as a revelation of the writer's secret dark twin, the story of himself and the world, and by extension he was inclined to see writing as shadowed by the repressed myths, the secrets of his culture
- used **repetition** as rediscovery, reinvention of what has been lived and missed, experienced but not understood
- both the author and his narrators keep coming back and back again to events that resist understanding, brim with hidden meaning and block the contact of the commemorating person with the commemorated experience
- weaves many lives into one life, many texts into one text, a text that seems to lack any circumference or close
- exploits the absence of a centre or central figure who is both there and not there because dead or traumatized
- employs **black characters** who act as a shadowy and admonitory chorus, as the present shadowed by the past
- obsessed with the presence or absence of link between words and actions, between language and experience

Assessment

- his earlier work prefers the private area, the intimacies of the inward vision summed up as Modernism, his later work gravitates towards the public area, the intensities of the outward, summed up as a shift to **Modernity**
- his later work inclines towards a more direct address of social and political issues and a search for some hope
- as the recipient of the Nobel Prize (1950) came to represent the Southern literature despite the paradox that the Southern literary tradition lies in folk tales and oral stories, inconsistent with Faulkner's often inaccessible work

Sartoris (1929)

Introducing the Family

- his first major novel, follows the declining history of several generations of a distinguished Mississippi family
- introduced his mythical setting, his central themes and the characters to work with throughout his whole career

The Sound and the Fury (1929)

Modernist Masterpiece

- his dense modernist masterpiece, examines the economic and emotional deterioration of the **Compson** family
- explores the disintegration of the family and the private obsessions of three brothers who lost their loved sister

As I Lay Dying (1930)

Burying the Mother

- a mixture of horror and comedy, presents the multiple perspectives of fifteen consciousnesses of fifteen people
- traces the mourning procession of a poor white family to fulfil the mother's wish for a burial in her hometown

The Unvanquished (1938)

Civil War Stories

- an episodic novel including seven short stories concerning the **Sartoris** family, set at the time of the Civil War

The Hamlet⁴⁸ (1940)

Poor White Trash Rise

- a deeply serious comedy focusing on the social transformation of the region, dealing with the rise to power and the eventual fall of the **Snopes**, a poor white entrepreneur family, beginning in Jefferson as tenants and outcasts
- includes 'The Spotted Horses', one of the many short stories that the author often incorporated into his novels

⁴⁸ *The Hamlet* together with *The Town* (1957) and *The Mansion* (1959) forms the **Snopes Trilogy**, connected by the Snopes family.

Jews &
Blacks***Go Down, Moses***⁴⁹ (1942)

- an episodic novel consisting of seven interrelated stories, previously published separately and now rewritten
- the title refers to a spiritual of the name, which draws a parallel between blacks in America and Jews in Egypt
- focuses on the racially mixed **McCaslin** family, relates the stories by the voice of Isaac⁵⁰ McCaslin, called Ike
- includes the novella 'The Bear', focused on Ike's growing up, learning about nature and coming to know life
- deals with the issues of slavery and race, vanishing wilderness, inheritance, stewardship and ownership of land

Black
Innocent***Intruder in the Dust*** (1948)

- continues the author's occupation with racial prejudice and social injustice in the South, follows a black farmer whose innocence in a white man's murder trial makes him a 'tyrant over the whole country's white conscience'

Caught up
by the Past***Requiem for a Nun*** (1951)

- a hybrid of a novel and a play, presents the main story in the dramatic form and the background in the narrative
- returns to the protagonist of *Sanctuary* (1931), Temple Drake, a girl then involved with drugs, criminals and prostitution, now a married woman with a child who must learn how to deal with her violent and turbulent past

Christ
Allegory***A Fable*** (1954)

- an allegory set during the false armistice in 1918, retells the story of Christ to dramatize its message of peace
- uses a story from the First World War as an allegory for the suffering of Christ and his crucifixion for mankind
- follows a corporal who orders his troops not to engage the enemy, on which the enemy does not attack either, and the war comes to a standstill until the corporal is arrested by a superior officer and executed by being shot

Snopes
Trilogy***The Town*** (1957)

- a more episodic continuation of the Snopes Trilogy, follows the rising socio-economic position of Flem Snopes

The Mansion (1959)

- the last book of the Snopes Trilogy, follows the fall of Flem Snopes, which is triggered by a plotting relative

Growing-
up Novel***The Reivers*** (1962)

- a picaresque novel, uncharacteristically light-hearted in the subject matter, in a straightforward narrative style

William Styron (1925–2006)

- qualifies as a peculiarly Southern writer in his concern with the themes of **guilt** and the indelible nature of **evil**

Southern
Family***Lie Down in Darkness*** (1951)

- the novel seems almost an exercise in Faulknerian tropes and themes, it reveals the tragic life and **suicide** of a girl whose rich Southern family was unable to supply either her or themselves with the love and security needed

Plantation
Novel***The Confessions of Nat Turner*** (1967)

- a radical rewriting of plantation romance, a fictitious memoir of the historical leader of the 1831 **slave revolt**
- criticized for its controversial racist stereotyping, including for instance the protagonist's fantasy of raping a white woman or his homosexual encounter with a fellow slave, the novel eventually won a Pulitzer Prize (1968)

Army
Novella***The Long March*** (1957)

- the novella deals with the author's experience in a military camp where he was trained before serving in Korea

American
Expatriates***Set This House on Fire*** (1960)

- a minor novel concerned with American intellectual expatriates on the Riviera, inspired by his stay in Europe
- centres on the themes of evil and **redemption**, shows a troubled alcoholic artist and his encounter with the evil

Post-
Holocaust
Novel***Sophie's Choice*** (1979)

- deals with the **Holocaust** theme, the historical event which cast its shadow over all subsequent Western history
- portrays a non-Jewish victim of the Holocaust, a Polish Roman Catholic woman who survived Auschwitz but lost her two children, sending her daughter to death when forced to choose one, and not hearing of her son again
- set in New York, follows Sophie's involvement with Nathan, a Jewish-American man plagued by his paranoid schizophrenia and cocaine addiction, and Stingo, a writer working on his first novel, who is the novel's narrator
- concludes with Sophie and Nathan committing suicide together and Stingo breaking down on learning about it

Depression
Memoir***Darkness Visible*** (1990)

- the author's memoir about his struggle with a serious case of clinical depression and his successful recovery
- the title refers to John Milton's blank verse epic *Paradise Lost* (1667), describing Hell as 'darkness visible'

⁴⁹ The Biblical Moses was ordered by God to lead the Israelites out of the Egyptian slavery, which he did by parting the Red Sea.

⁵⁰ The Biblical Isaac was the son of Abraham, who was ready to sacrifice Isaac to God to prove his devotion but was stopped by an angel. Isaac married Rebekah, who bore him Esau and Jacob, and in his old age he was tricked into blessing Jacob instead of Esau.

Truman Capote (1924–1984)

Short
Story

- openly **homosexual**, led a glamorous lifestyle, plagued by depressions, breakdowns, alcohol and drug abuse

‘*Miriam*’ (1945)

- his first successful story, explores loneliness of an elderly woman haunted by visions of a girl intruding on her

Growing-
Up Novels

Other Voices, Other Rooms (1948)

- his first published novel, a semi-autobiographical Gothic tale of a homosexual boy groping towards maturity

The Grass Harp (1951)

- a novel following an orphaned boy and two elderly ladies in retreat in a treehouse from which they observe life

Glamour
Novella

Breakfast at Tiffany's (1958)

- a novella following a light-hearted, freewheeling, romantic playgirl, Holly Golightly, living in New York City

Non-Fiction
Novel

In Cold Blood (1966)

- a ‘Non-Fiction Novel’ in the vein of **New Journalism**⁵¹, written after a five-year-long research on its subject
- based on facts concerning an incident of 1959 when two ex-convicts, Perry Smith and Richard Hickock, broke into the isolated farmhouse of a respectable family, the Clutters, tied the four family members and killed them
- the murders left with the loot of forty or fifty dollars, were captured, sentenced to death and executed in 1965
- captures the bleak emptiness of life on the vast wheat plains of Midwest, where the Clutters lived, and also the quit desperation of Smith and Hickock as they wander across the country in search of a job or someone to rob
- the novel aims to make understandable the cold fact of the murder and the **violence of contemporary society**
- eschews social or psychological analysis, avoids sensationalism, presents cold facts derived from observation, interview and record, using a coolly dispassionate tone, a cold but uncynical eye and scrupulously mean style
- supplies no explanation for the killing, suggests that ‘the crime was a psychological accident, virtually an impersonal act’ but the victims had experienced prolonged suffering, so that the aggressors had to suffer in turn
- leaves it to the reader to see violence as random, gratuitous, meaningless, as peculiar to contemporary America

Cold-Fact
Style

Collection

Music for Chameleons (1980)

- a collection of fiction and non-fiction, includes short stories as well as conversations with famous personalities

Celebrity
Articles

Answered Prayers (1986)

- an unfinished posthumously published novel, a series of articles revealing personal lives of famous celebrities

Flannery O'Connor (1925–1964)

Biography

- born in Savannah, Georgia, her family later moved to Milledgeville (1938), a small town within the same state
- spent two years at Yaddo, an artist's colony in Saratoga Springs, New York, working there on her first novel
- diagnosed with lupus (1950), a hereditary disease in her family, on which she returned back to Milledgeville

Writing
Features

- her fiction is appreciated for its density, strikingly original metaphors and her rendering of local vernaculars
- her writing was formed by her being a Southerner and a Roman **Catholic** in a predominantly Protestant region
- portrays the South as a savage and empty wasteland of decaying towns and villages and endless tobacco roads
- the atmosphere of her work is brutal and farcical, sees the world as a nightmare that is comic because absurd
- sparkles with a bizarre comic inventiveness, shows **grotesque** parodies of humanity rather than human beings
- presents her characters as distorted in some way, social or physical, mental or material, to mirror their guilt, original sin and spiritual poverty, they seem to be stubbornly foolish and ignorant witnesses to the power of evil
- interprets experience in tough and uncompromising terms, without compassion that excuses human weakness

Writing
Subjects

- centres the meaning of life in **redemption** by Christ, which she sees as a painful act of divorce from this world
- explores a world of corrosion, decay and evil, apparently forsaken by God but saved by his incalculable **grace**
- the corruption of her characters acts as a proof of the great scope of God's extraordinary forgiveness and love, her characters ultimately reveal the workings of eternal redemption, even though against their will or awareness
- produces a fictional world whose significance lies in its obvious aberration, its **Gothic** deviance from the norm
- explains that ‘the novelist with Christian concerns will find in modern life distortions which are repugnant to him’ but which his audience may find ‘natural’, therefore the novelist must make his vision ‘apparent by **shock**’

Geranium and Other Stories (1947)

Short
Stories

- a short story collection against which she earned her degree at the prestigious Iowa Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa, became the first writer to graduate with a work of fiction rather than with a theoretical thesis

⁵¹ New Journalism was promoted by Tom Wolfe (b. 1931), author of *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968). New Journalists should stick to the facts and use the following four techniques: extensive dialogue, detailed recording of the everyday activities, careful arrangement of the narrative scene by scene and a consistent narrative point of view.

Masterpiece Novel	<p><u>Wise Blood</u> (1952)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the novel's protagonist, Haze Motes, preaches 'the Church Without Christ' and declares that Jesus was a liar, which provides for a comedy of savage paradox because Motes relies on belief for the power of his blasphemy the Christ-haunted protagonist struggles to deny his faith but also perversely admits the sway it has over him the novel's title refers to the idea that mentally afflicted people tend to see the world more clearly than others
Short Stories	<p><u>A Good Man is Hard to Find</u> (1955)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> her first short story collection, called for a blues song of the name which was popularized by Bessie Smith
Religious Novel	<p><u>The Violent Bear It Away</u> (1960)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the novel continues her exploration of characters who attempt to discard their faith only to find it reaffirmed
Short Stories	<p><u>Everything That Rises Must Converge</u> (1965)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a short story collection, published posthumously, takes its title from the French theologian Teilhard de Chardin
<p>Eudora Welty (1909–2001)</p>	
Views of the Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> born in Jackson, Mississippi, came to know the state well when she gathered here material for a documentary insists that 'feelings are bound up in place' and that you judge where you are 'by knowing where you started' sees place as fact and feeling, says that 'location pertains to feeling' and 'feeling profoundly pertains to place'
Writing Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> her short stories are comic, tragic, lyrical, Gothic or grotesque, her novels often combine all of these features focuses on the human consciousness, on attempts to find one's place and know oneself, often through myths influenced by the hawthornian romance, mixes the marvellous and the realistic to reveal truths of human heart
Short Stories	<p><u>A Curtain of Green</u> (1941), <u>The Wide Net</u> (1943), <u>The Bride of Innisfallen</u> (1955)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> collections of short stories, set mostly in and around the South, though some are set in London, Italy or Greece
American Romance	<p><u>The Robber Bridegroom</u> (1942)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a novel set in the Natchez Trace region of Mississippi in the eighteenth century, featuring the Natchez Trace as a symbol of division between the wilderness and the civilization, the Trace being a link to Nashville, Tennessee based loosely on a Brothers Grimm fairytale, uses the peculiarly American genre of the hawthornian romance explores the ways we try to understand the past and accommodate it to the present, to attach memory to place suggests that landscape and history are both fictions, they are spun out of certain given facts of space and time
Plantation Novel	<p><u>Delta Wedding</u> (1946)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a magical but also slyly mocking plantation novel, set on a Mississippi plantation in 1923, a year picked by the author as being one in which no wars or natural disasters occurred to disrupt the normal pattern of domestic life the narrative is uneventful in the conventional sense, concentrates on the people without any undue influences describes 'many little lives lived privately', people living alone and leading lives of extraordinary solitude and even mystery, for any communality they share is partial and any order or ceremony they achieve is but fleeting follows the complicated relationships of an extended family which is to have one of their daughters married includes numerous analogies to myths, the marriage itself is a parallel to the myth of Hades and Persephone⁵²
Interrelated Short Stories	<p><u>The Golden Apples</u> (1949)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> her finest collection of short stories, features interconnected stories, all set in the town of Morgana, Mississippi the characters appear in several stories at once, the key events of their lives are not revealed chronologically but in different stories, which gives the impression of the stories being told and read all at one and the same time the central character is King MacLain, paralleled to Zeus, a character and an archetype at once, he represents both the wanderer searching for the golden apples of Yeats's poem and the modern man searching for his place
Tragicomic Novel	<p><u>The Ponder Heart</u> (1954)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a tragicomic novel about a loneliness uncle who gives away family fortune and marries a girl who is seventeen
Storytelling Novel	<p><u>Losing Battles</u> (1970)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the novel is a comedy but describes with sympathy people who wage a disgracefully unequal struggle with circumstances but remain hopeful despite everything and use old tales and talking as a stay against confusion focuses on 'people at the rock bottom of their lives', poor farmers from the hill country during the Depression centres at a family reunion whose members untiringly keep on telling tall tales, family legends, personal memories, folk humour, religious myth, stories of magic and mystery, each one having his own telling technique gives the sense that each tale and conversation belongs to a larger body of speech, a continuum of storytelling

⁵² Hades, the god of the underworld in Greek mythology, abducted Persephone, the beautiful daughter of Zeus and Demeter, goddess of the harvest. Demeter made the earth cease to be fertile until it was agreed that Persephone will stay for two thirds of the year with her parents and for one third of the year with Hades, which is the winter time.

- presents conversation as a way of escape from loneliness and of identification with a particular place and past

Masterpiece *The Optimist's Daughter* (1972)

Novel

- the novel examines death, loneliness, disillusion and the necessity of knowing oneself and accepting one's fate

(11) Southern Existentialism and Genre Literature

Walker Percy, Richard Ford, Cormac McCarthy

Existentialism

- Existentialist Occupations • existentialism arises from our weariness with the stereotypical everyday life and awareness of human mortality
- the only philosophy to deal with **the absurd**, which springs from our striving despite our knowledge of death
- focuses on the conditions of existence of the individual and his responsibilities, actions, emotions and thoughts
- seeks to define how to achieve a fulfilling life, what obstacles must be overcome and what factors are involved
- concerned with the existential obstacles and distractions of despair, angst, **alienation**, boredom and absurdity
- American Existentialism • existentialism was rooted first in Jewish circles in the 1950s, was associated for instance with Michael Gold's *Jews Without Money* (1930), Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep* (1934), also with Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud
- introduced to the South by the essayist and novelist Walker Percy (1916–1990) at the beginning of the 1960s
- existentialism was originally associated with left-wing Marxist writers, Percy was however a Roman Catholic
- based his views on the French atheist existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, on the Catholic existentialism of Jacques **Maritain** and especially on the Danish Catholic pre-existentialist Søren **Kierkegaard**
- Percy & Kierkegaard • Percy adopts the basic terms from Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* (1843), contrasting the atheist and believer views
- avoids the existentialist terms 'estrangement' and 'alienation', prefers Sartre's term nausea, malady or **malaise**
- malaise refers to the state of mind which doubts the meaning of existence and is tired of one's life and oneself
- Kierkegaard describes three means of overcoming malaise, Percy reproduces them in translations or digests
- **rotation**: experiencing something new beyond the expectation of something new, even a shocking experience
- **repetition**: promoting an unconscious stereotype to a conscious ritual, including the experiences of déjà vu
- **zone crossing**: moving from the already known to the yet unknown, either geographically or metaphorically

Walker Percy (1916–1990)

- Background • raised in Mississippi in the family of his uncle, William Alexander Percy, author of *Lanterns on the Levee*⁵³ (1941), a memoir presenting him as genteel, public-minded, scholarly, culturally conservative white Southerner
- realized the limitations of the mixture of secular traditionalism and fatalism that his 'Uncle Will' represented
- interested in science, medicine, psychoanalysis and philosophy of language, embarked on a serious course of philosophical and religious study when he contracted tuberculosis and was quarantined for an extended period
- returned to the South to spend most of his life in Covington, Louisiana, and converted to **Roman Catholicism**
- Philosophy • regarded the view of the human being in contemporary psychology, philosophy of science and linguistics as limiting, considered it erroneous to treat the human being as an animal species responding to its environment
- the formalism of adaptive responses to an environment cannot correctly render the concerns of human beings about moral responsibilities to other people and the questions about the purpose of life or the right way to lead it
- seeks to provide a disciplined true **account of meaning and being** which can take into consideration the limitations of the existing scientific descriptions without devoting itself to Kantian quests after absolute being
- believes that the inability of contemporary culture to provide a satisfactory account of meaning leads people to seek the **sense of being alive** in substitute extreme experiences as is the pursuit of power, which does not help
- the consequence of a materialist view of human nature is estrangement from God, estrangement from self and estrangement from language, which results in a life in that severe moral deadness alternates with a moral panic
- Writing • his novels are the artistic play of a disciplined intellectual with a broad scientific and philosophical knowledge
- ridicules the South with 'the storytelling tradition, sense of identity, tragic dimension, community, history', describes rather a culture of well-fed vulgarians who do not read or think much but who at least leave one alone
- his characters are Southerners only in nostalgic ways, they do not feel the desperate combination of love and guilt for their region, they are racist, not in the dramatic Southern way but in the impersonal way of Northerners
- the characters live in a despairing world, but do not **despair** in the characteristically Southern way of grim stoical fatalists, they cannot despair because their everydayness denies them the capacity to name their feelings
- The Moviegoer** (1961)
- Characters • his first novel, winner of the National Book Award, reminiscent of Albert Camus's novel *The Stranger* (1942)
- features a comically **alienated idler** whose idleness criticizes the pointlessness of everyone else's industry, a character type similar to Melville's Ishmael, Thoreau's persona in *Walden* (1854) or Fitzgerald's Nick Carraway
- includes the morally earnest character of Aunt Emily, modelled on the author's uncle William Alexander Percy
- the protagonist, Binx, is a stockbroker because it is a job he does not have to take seriously as work, he holes up in a lower-middle-class neighbourhood rather to live than in the respectable district with the rest of his family

⁵³ A levee is an embankment raised to prevent a river from overflowing; Percy was a member of a commission to prevent floods.

- observes the little turns of posture and voice that disclose the illusions of particular character types, delights in satirical thumbnail descriptions of passing acquaintances, proud of the biting perceptiveness of his observations
- Moviegoing
- feels oppressed by a sense of the everydayness of life and searches for something different from the everyday, feels the **malady of the quotidian** when he sits in a large car, hears public figures orate or overhears earnest talk
 - spends his time going to moviehouses, taking delight in the falseness of the movies because in their transparent falsehood they offer him a way of withholding himself from other things equally false but in less obvious ways
 - the other characters regard his moviegoing as a retreat from reality, but their lives are no more real than Binx's, except that they are not capable to recognize that the uneasiness they keep on feeling is despair of an unreal life
- Women
- Binx's other refuge from the everyday is the experience of random sexual passion, as with his secretary Sharon
 - his relationship with his cousin Kate is different in that Kate has a despair about life similar to Binx's, except that it is unrelieved by an **ironic sensibility**, dating to the experience when her fiancé was killed in a car crash
 - Kate learns from the accident similarly as Binx learns from his being wounded in Korea that the emotional heightening which comes from the presence of death substitutes the sense of reality that lacks in everyday life
 - Kate is put by her family under the care of a psychiatrist who keeps on trying to return her to the well-adjusted everydayness that she wishes to escape, she also attempts to commit suicide because she wants to stop not living
- Conclusion
- Kate flees with Binx to Chicago, but the romantic trip does not work out, and they return to New Orleans on Ash Wednesday, face Binx's wrathful aunt and decide to get married, while Binx also decides to study medicine
 - Binx contemplates the odd mix of the worldly and the unworldly in an African American businessman leaving the church having received the Ash Wednesday ashes and wonders if the same can be found in Kate and himself
 - the ending is suffused with the author's own special brand of ironic existentialism combined with urgent **faith**, Binx may not have found the meaning of experience but at least he does not know for sure that it is meaningless
- Baptism
- The Last Gentleman* (1966)**
- the protagonist of the novel, Will Barrett, is the descendant of a distinguished Southern family in moral decline
 - becomes drawn to a brilliant and sensitive young man dying of leukaemia and tries to prepare him for death
 - evades several choices prepared by the man's family, including his Babbitt father, his paranoid anti-Semitic mother, his sister-in-law's New Age religions and his brother's devotion to sex, alcohol and thoughts of suicide
 - accepts the choice of his sister, a self-sacrificing Catholic, and manages to have the dying man baptised before he dies, which may not be helpful to the sick but at least persuades his brother to postpone his scheduled suicide
- Dystopian Satire
- Love in the Ruins: The Adventures of a Bad Catholic at a Time Near the End of the World* (1971)**
- his masterpiece, a comic dystopian fantasy and political satire, set in a Louisiana in which the cultural conflicts of the 1960s have continued unchecked for a few decades, turning the region into a site of decay and devastation
 - the Catholic church is split into three parts, one a right-wing American parody of Catholicism, another a parody of liberation theology and the last is a disconsolate remnant still loyal to Rome, including the protagonist
 - the political parties split too, the Republicans are the Knotheads, a self-righteously Christian party concerned chiefly with protecting its money interests, the Democrats are the Lefts, advocates of extremely liberal policies
 - the Lefts suffer from Angelism, leaving this world for a world of pure thought, the Knotheads suffer from rage
 - two more groups opt out of the quarrel between the Lefts and the Knotheads, the Bantus are essentially the Black Panther party who raid gold courses and shopping centres, the Choctaws are the hippies who cultivate pot
- Faustian Theme
- the protagonist is the 'bad Catholic' of the subtitle, a neurophysiologist named Dr. Thomas More, who favours neither of the parties and treats them both with an irony qualified by some personal affection for their adherents
 - More invents a device which makes it possible to diagnose people's moral and philosophical problems and to remove the split between mind and body by describing the human being rigorously as both a spirit and a body
 - More succumbs to the temptation of signing the device over to the Devil, a pharmaceutical salesman who alters the device so that it alters states of mind and exacerbates the differences between the Knotheads and Lefts
 - chaos breaks out until More vanquishes the salesman with a last-second prayer to his collateral ancestor, St. Thomas More, on which the tensions subside, the Bantus strike oil and take up golf, and More marries his nurse
- Essays
- The Message in the Bottle* (1975), *Lost in the Cosmos* (1983)**
- collections of professional and popular essays on the subjects of psychoanalysis and philosophy of language
- Arthurian Parallel
- Lancelot* (1977)**
- the novel follows a dejected lawyer, Lancelot Lamar, who murders his wife on discovering that he is not the father of her daughter and is sent to a mental home where he tells his story through his retrospective reflections
 - the protagonist experiences a vision of a modern American consumer culture whose moral emptiness he seeks to expose, he is compared to Sir Lancelot and his quest against depravity is linked to the quest of the Holy Grail
- Sequel Novel
- The Second Coming* (1980)**
- a sequel to *The Last Gentleman*, follows the protagonist in a somewhat sentimental retelling of *The Moviegoer*

Sequel
Novel***The Thanatos⁵⁴ Syndrome* (1987)**

- a sequel to *Love in the Ruins*, the novel reflects the author's disapproval of mechanical attempts to manipulate people in the service of presumed social good, because moral aims can only be served through moral reflection
- depicts an attempt to reform people's behaviour and raise their intelligence by dissolving heavy sodium in the water supply which runs disastrously astray, lowering sexual inhibitions resulting in an epidemic of child abuse
- suggests that a moral motive detached from the divine means also a detachment from circumspection about fallen human nature, so that in our certainty about being in right we may turn the best things to the worst uses

Essays

***Signposts in a Strange Land* (1991)**

- a posthumously published collection of essays, edited and given its name by the Jesuit priest Patrick Samway

Richard Ford (b. 1944)Influences
on Writing

- compared variously to Hemingway for his occupation with male affairs and to **Updike** for his suburbia themes
- learned his realistic description of characters and setting from **Hemingway** and his view of success and failure from Fitzgerald, also admired Faulkner who inspired his Southern grotesque novel *A Piece of My Heart* (1976)
- influenced most by Walker **Percy**, through whom he knew Camus, Sartre or Kierkegaard, but is atheist himself
- condemns Catholicism but most of all condemns those who give up their lives and resort to committing suicide
- avoids presenting any moral judgements in his writing, treats his characters with a detached, dispassionate tone

Writing
Subjects

- captures the **dark aspects** of ordinary people which may be suddenly revealed in a violent or extreme action
- describes characters who lead commonplace suburbia lives but happen to commit a criminal or immoral action
- portrays mostly men in their forties, divorced, leading their everyday lives and looking out for another chance
- focuses on dangling men who lead outwardly comfortable lives, as in the movies, journalism or insurance, but who are wryly ill at ease, they are at odds with themselves and the world, sunk in an inevitably quiet desperation
- his characters dread inconsequence, fear that they are undistinguishable from others, that they are swallowed by the anonymous 'weave of culture', an accumulation of insignificances, a culture not just ordinary but blank

Good Man
Novel***The Ultimate Good Luck* (1981)**

- a novel influenced by Graham Greene, set in Mexico, shows a man helping his ex-girlfriend save her brother
- suggests that one must not avoid dangerous situations so as to gain some experience and not to waste one's life

Bascombe
Novel***The Sportswriter* (1986)**

- the first of the series of three novels concentrated on Frank Bascombe, a failed novelist turned sportswriter, who undergoes a spiritual crisis following the death of his son; inspired by his brief occupation as a sportswriter

Short
Stories***Rock Springs* (1987)**

- a short story collection, dealing mostly with dysfunctional families and their effects on young male narrators

Growing-
Up Novel***Wildlife* (1990)**

- a novel narrated from the perspective of a teenage boy whose parents are experiencing a difficult marriage
- the subject of a maturing boy coming to terms with the problems of his parents recurs in more of his writings

Bascombe
Sequel***Independence Day* (1995)**

- a Pulitzer Prize winning novel, a continuation of the life of Frank Bascombe, now a middle-aged real estate agent, who spends the title holiday visiting his ex-wife, his troubled son, his current lover and several clients

Existentialist
Novellas***Women with Men* (1997)**

- a volume containing two existentialist novellas set in Paris and the short story 'Jealous', printed in *New Yorker*

Bascombe
Sequel***The Lay of the Land* (2006)**

- the last Frank Bascombe novel, set against the background of presidential elections, following the now older protagonist struggling with prostate cancer and just arranging a Thanksgiving dinner for his family and friends

Cormac McCarthy (b. 1933)Writing
Subjects

- meditates on the unhomelike nature of our environment, the scary disconnection of the human and non-human
- one of the essential preoccupations of his fiction is the elemental and equivocal activity of human settlement
- qualifies as a **literary hybrid** writing in a confluence of styles, reflecting the plural environment we all inhabit
- portrays the collapse of our cultural illusions about belonging to one stable community and a set of traditions
- depicts a constantly changing landscape in which different cultures see their otherness and try to understand it
- makes his characters cross and recross the landscape, dissolving the oppositions of the clearing and wilderness

⁵⁴ In Greek mythology, Thanatos is the daemon personification of Death. In psychoanalysis, human beings have a life instinct, called Eros, and a death drive, called Thanatos. In literature, these opposites are comparable to the Dionysian and Apollonian dichotomy.

- melts down the structures of perception and reveals what is today a fluid 'world without measure and bound'
- all his novels are preoccupied with a sense of blankness, evil and above all **homelessness**, showing the 'dark parody of progress' of our lives, which is in fact a restless wandering, cultural and topographical displacement
- South & West
 - his early novels rewrite Southern subjects and themes, discussing the clash of pastoralism and the anti-pastoral
 - the geography of his first four novels is confined to a single Southern place in and about Maryville, Tennessee
 - his later novels deconstruct **Western** myth and tell stories of a newer and truer West, using the Western setting
 - the later novels invert traditional Western stories about crisis and redemption, lacking any sign of regeneration
 - the Western novels are marked by a sense of the bleakness of Western space, the unobstructed extension of the landscape triggers not the conventional feelings of freedom but of empty immensity, the denial of human value
- Initiation
 - The Orchard Keeper*** (1965)
 - his first novel, influenced by Faulkner, about a boy mentored by an outlawed bootlegger and a reclusive hermit
- Incest
 - Outer Dark*** (1968)
 - follows the search of a woman for her infant, conceived with her brother, who left the baby in the forest to die
- Perversity
 - Child of God*** (1973)
 - the novel portrays a lonely young man, deprived by the isolation of landscape, and his decline into perversity
- Outcasts
 - Suttree*** (1979)
 - shows the experiences of the eponymous character, a fisherman on the Tennessee River, among the homeless
- Frontier
 - Blood Meridian*** (1985)
 - a violent frontier tale about a boy who joins a gang of outlaws hunting Indians along the U.S.-Mexico border
- Border Trilogy
 - The Border Trilogy: ***All the Pretty Horses*** (1992), ***The Crossing*** (1994), ***Cities of the Plain*** (1998)
 - the first volume is the coming of age of a teenage Texan cowboy travelling to Mexico, made into a film (2000)
 - the second book portrays the picaresque adventures of two brothers moving between New Mexico and Mexico
 - the last volume brings together the characters of the previous books, employing them on a New Mexico ranch
- Western
 - No Country for Old Men*** (2005)
 - a modern bloody western, named for Yeats's poem 'Sailing to Byzantium', made into a successful film (2007)
- Dystopia
 - The Road*** (2006)
 - a dystopian growing-up novel, a Pulitzer Prize winner, about a father and son trying to survive after a disaster

(12) Growing-Up Novel

Jerome David Salinger, Lewis Nordan, Warren Miller, John Irving, Fred Chappell

Growing-Up Novel

History
& Patterns

- a popular American genre at least since Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), which established the archetypes of the obedient and the rebellious boy respectively⁵⁵
- the genre was variously developed by different ethnic groups and in different regions, as Henry Roth's Jewish novel *Call It Sleep* (1934) or William Faulkner's Southern *The Unvanquished* (1938) and *The Reivers* (1962)
- many growing-up novels share the pattern of **journey** as a means of maturation, mostly from a town to a city, discernible for instance in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957) and in Cormac McCarthy's growing-up novels
- another pattern is writing the story for **therapeutic** reasons, as J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951)
- the pioneering 1950s and 1960s growing-up novels focused on the child in the vein of **psychological** realism
- the later 1980s and 1990s novels written at the time of political correctness use a naïve child narrator who can afford to be politically incorrect or use a fictional child modelled on the author for reasons of inner censorship
- the later novels often have a political focus, experiment with **satire** and with absurd and grotesque elements

Jerome David Salinger (1919–2010)

- started his literary career by writing short stories published in magazines already before the Second World War
- after his first novel produced several collections of short stories but retired in the 1960s and stopped publishing

The Catcher in the Rye (1951)

Style &
Themes

- presents an unhappy teenager, lonely, quixotic, compassionate, plagued by the 'phoniness' of his environment
- describes his running away from boarding school, his spell in New York and his eventual nervous breakdown
- the title, taken from a poem by Robert Burns, refers to the boy's desire to **preserve innocence** of those still to grow up, having lost his own, to stop their fall from innocence into experience, from childhood into adulthood
- written in a confessional mode, draws readers into the narrator's resistance to the surrounding stiffening world
- written in a persuasive vernacular idiom, an invented language which came to be adopted by ordinary speakers
- the protagonist, Holden Caulfield, is an **universal** middle-class character with no particular ethnic background
- recalls *Huckleberry Finn* in presenting an outsider who dislikes system and distrusts authority, makes his way through a world of hypocrisy and describes the stupidity of the people he meets with engagingly quirky humour
- differs from Huck in making Holden more knowing, more judgemental and more implicated in his 'phony' circumstances, replaces Huck's clarity, candour and truth-telling by Holden's unease, uncertainty and **confusion**
- the narrator is both confessional and defensive, longing to reveal himself but also fearful of dropping the mask

Holden
v. Huck

Nine Stories (1953)

- a collection of stories, including 'A Perfect Day for Bananafish', on the suicide of the veteran Seymour Glass

Franny and Zooey (1961)

- a collection of the two title stories, featuring Franny and Zooey Glass, a sister and a brother in their twenties

Novellas

Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction (1963)

- a collection of the two title novellas, on the lonely, brilliant, eccentric individualists Seymour and Buddy Glass

Warren Miller (1921–1966)

- a novelist and scriptwriter, author of several novels on **racial** and political themes, adherent of left-wing views

*The Cool World*⁵⁶ (1959)

Maturing
in Harlem

- a growing-up novel narrated by a fourteen-year-old black boy who rises to the leader of a Harlem **street gang**
- introduces a sensitive adolescent whose marginal society breeds anger, confusion and a poignant tenderness
- presents the black perspective of bare apartments and shabby hallways where the knife-carrying gangs meet
- relieves the seedy urban ghetto setting and the struggle for one's position by moments of appealing humour
- exposes the emotional and intellectual attitudes of the characters through a masterly rendered **Harlem idiom**

Political
Novels

Flush Times (1962)

- a decadent novel featuring a New Yorker accompanying his estranged wife to Cuba where she is to have an abortion and where he gets involved with a group of U.S. refugees dealing in gambling, drugs and prostitution
- the protagonist falls in love with a Chinese Cuban girl, who is kidnapped and killed, and ends up killing himself

⁵⁵ Also *Tom Sawyer Abroad* (1894), *Tom Sawyer Detective* (1896) and the unfinished *Huck Finn* and *Tom Sawyer among the Indians*.

⁵⁶ Brilliantly translated by Jan Zábrana as *Prezydent Krokodylů* [sic] (1963), which succeeds in re-creating the original vernacular.

***The Siege of Harlem* (1964)**

- a political satire and literary parody, pokes fun at the satire in the Swiftian tradition and the Uncle Remus tales, records the tale of an old grandfather who describes how Harlem seceded and became an independent country

***Looking for the General* (1964)**

- a novel narrated by a physicist who becomes convinced of the existence of intelligent beings beyond Earth and follows the general of the title, who holds the same views, in his attempts to escape from the terrestrial confines

John Irving (b. 1942)Writing
Features

- author of novels reflecting the concerns of the 1960s and showing the clash of libertarian and traditional views
- noted for engaging story lines, colourful characterizations, macabre humour and examination of **topical issues**
- characteristic for his **Dickensian** sprawling plots, chains of improbable incidents and a large cast of characters
- his recurring themes are his native New England, wrestling, prostitutes, deadly accidents and missing parents

Maturing
Writer***The World According to Garp* (1978)**

- a fanciful story of a wonderfully talent young novelist who is murdered at thirty-three by a disgruntled reader
- its oblique self-referentiality and intellectual subversiveness qualify as an instance of fictional postmodernism
- the protagonist is T. S. Garp, the initials standing for the occupation of his father, the Technical Sergeant Garp
- his mother conceived Garp when she essentially raped the Technical Sergeant, then dying of a shrapnel wound
- Garp grows up to be interested in sex, wrestling and writing, unlike his mother he marries and fathers children
- throughout the novel Garp and his family experience dark and violent events through which they learn to grow

Maturing
Five Kids***The Hotel New Hampshire* (1981)**

- a coming-of-age novel following the experiences of a married couple and their five very idiosyncratic children

Maturing
Doctor***The Cider House Rules* (1985)**

- employs a young doctor protagonist to demonstrate the attitudes and perils attending the question of abortion

Maturing
Prophet***A Prayer for Owen Meany* (1989)**

- the title character is a gnomelike figure with the gift of prophecy and a deep belief that he is God's instrument
- his friend, obsessed with the nature of faith, tells Meany's tale against the background of the Vietnam War

Picaresque
Novel***A Son of the Circus* (1994)**

- a tale of a film star, a missionary, twins separated at birth, a dwarf chauffeur and a serial killer meeting in India

Fred Chappell (b. 1936)Writing
Features

- began his career writing sci-fi stories and historical fantasies exploring the inspirations of artists and scientists
- moved to preoccupation with the relationship between the literary work and the actual life where it originates
- his characters are preoccupied with **stories** which they seek to use to know their past and possibly to change it
- dissolves the line between fact and fiction, often uses autobiographical facts and imaginatively re-creates them
- his semi-autobiographical growing-up tetralogy portrays some universal themes as well as specific aspects of growing up with the traditions and habits of the **Appalachian region**, where the author himself was brought up

Back to
Childhood***It Is Time, Lord* (1963)**

- his first novel, a modernist piece influenced by Faulkner, follows the successful editor of a university press who explores his childhood to explain his nightmares but only adds more when he causes the death of his friend

Changing
One's Past***The Inkling* (1965)**

- may be seen as a balladic story about the decay of a family, isolation and madness inspired by the nineteenth-century British Gothic novel or as an allegory of the struggle of will and lust inspired by French decadent poets
- describes dark aspects of the human mind, following a protagonist who moves in time to warn his younger self

Horror
Fantasy***Dagon* (1968)**

- inspired by the horror fantasies of Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890–1937), features a protagonist who deliberately chooses a violent death and reflects on it from the netherworld while waiting for his last judgement

Fighting
the Absurd***The Gaudy Place* (1973)**

- portrays several characters from different social classes coming to terms with their absurd world, including a young intellectual attempting to perform a useless action, like in Albert Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942)

Kirkman
Tetralogy

The Kirkman Tetralogy: ***I Am One of You Forever*** (1985), ***Brighten the Corner Where You Are*** (1989), ***Farewell, I'm Bound to Leave You*** (1996), ***Look Back All the Green Valley*** (1999)

- named for the boy protagonist Jess Kirkman, set in the town of Tipton, modelled on Canton, North Carolina

- the first book features the storyteller **Uncle Zeno**, the namesake of the ancient Greek stoic philosopher Zeno of Elea, whose many stories have the power of vaporizing the people with whom they deal from the actual world
- includes a chapter called 'The Storytellers', a part of which was earlier published as a short story, and in which the boy protagonist tells anew Zeno's story about him and his father, fearing that otherwise they would vanish
- suggests that some mysteries had better remain unsolved and that attempts to rationalize may prove disastrous
- the second part is Jess's comic dream of his father, a teacher who dared to challenge the Bible with Darwinism
- the third book is told by the voices of Jess's mother and grandmother, whose death serves as the book's frame
- the last volume traces Jess's search in the past of his late father, which fails to bring any surprising revelations

Lewis Nordan (b. 1939)

Writing
Inspiration

- grew up in the small town of Itta Bena, Mississippi, and the Mississippi Delta⁵⁷ features in much of his writing
- brought up by a step-father for whom he felt a mixture of affection and hatred and who inspired his character of Gilbert Mecklin, the father of Sugar Mecklin, a house painter, a heavy drinker and the chronically losing type
- turns his native town into the fictional Arrow Catcher, the prototypical **Southern** small town populated by men who enjoy drinking and hunting and women who suffer depressions and hope for a better fate for their children
- the town of Arrow Catcher is headed by a sheriff who has troubles coming to terms with the large number of dwarfs, idiots and cripples in the town's population, including his son Hydro who suffers from hydrocephalus⁵⁸
- deaths in the town are always rendered in the **grotesque** manner and are never the definite end of the character because the same stories are often attributes to different characters and there is no telling what is fact or fiction

Motifs
& Themes

- his frequent motifs are the idea that we are all alone, which is uttered even by his child protagonists, the idea that getting what you want too early may ruin your life and the parallel of maturing and overcoming **loneliness**
- his writing is based on telling and retelling stories, often presenting the same story in several different versions
- his stories are pervaded with a sense of mystery and secret, with emotions springing from recalling the stories
- the emotions derive from memories only, the present provides but for useless search and emotional emptiness
- his characters view their lives as movies, as directors they choose bombastic but finally self-destructive stunts

Short
Stories

Welcome to the Arrow Catcher Fair (1983)

- a short story collection, the title story introduces the arrow catching sport, practised originally by two friends, one white and one Indian, one firing sharp arrows at his partner and the other always managing to catch them

The All-Girl Football Team (1986)

- a short story collection, including the story 'Sugar, the Eunuchs and Big G. B.' which deals with a supposedly autobiographical incident when Sugar attempts to shoot his father through a kitchen window, but his pistol fails

Growing-Up
Masterpiece

Music of the Swamp (1991)

- a novel-like series of interconnected stories, the culmination of stories featuring **Sugar Mecklin** and his father

Black Boy
Murdered

Wolf Whistle (1993)

- the title refers to the incident which happened in the town called Money, located near the author's hometown, when a fourteen-year-old African American boy was murdered for daring to wolf whistle a white woman (1955)
- a novel presenting Sugar this time as a minor character who happens to discover the dead body of a black boy
- focuses on those responsible for the boy's death, deals with the serious issue of racial violence in a comic way

Hydro
the Hero

The Sharpshooter Blues (1995)

- the novel is a grotesque exploration of various forms of violence in a Southern small town, portrays the clash of innocence and cruelty in reintroducing the idiot character of **Hydro** who eliminates two dangerous criminals
- the town takes invented stories of violence and murder for fact but disbelieves the true story of Hydro's deed

Single Event
Change

The Lightning Song (1997)

- a novel set in the Mississippi hills where the father of the child protagonist runs a farm breeding exotic llamas
- examines the theme of family relationships and the question how a single event can utterly change one's life

Autobio-
graphy

Boy with Loaded Gun (2000)

- initially conceived as an autobiography, turned out to resemble rather the style of literary fiction, all the events included are based on fact, but some dialogues are invented, some names changed and some situations adapted

⁵⁷ The Mississippi Delta is technically not a delta but a fertile flat plain located in the the state of Mississippi. Not to be confused with the Mississippi River Delta, the actual delta through which the Mississippi river empties in the Gulf of Mexico in Louisiana.

⁵⁸ Hydrocephalus, or 'Water on the Brain', is an inborn medical condition characterized by abnormal accumulation of fluid in the brain. This causes pressure inside the skull, a progressive enlargement of the head, mental disability and sometimes leads to death.

(13) Cultural Pluralism in American Literature

Leslie Marmon Silko, Louise Erdrich, James Welch, Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan

Multiculturalism and Pluralism

Concept
Develop-
ments

- multiculturalism observes that there exist many different cultures but does not describe their mutual interaction
- pluralism suggests that every culture is influenced by every other, there is one native culture and others added
- multiculturalism and pluralism both promote the existence of multiple ethnic cultures within one larger culture
- at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth century there were attempts to create **national American** literature independent from the European tradition, the Old Continent models were discarded and new identity was sought
- at the beginning of the twentieth century **Israel Zangwill** (1864–1926), a British playwright, produced his play *The Melting Pot* (1908), which suggests that different nationalities come to the U. S. to be melted to Americans
- Horace Kallen (1882–1974), a Jewish American philosopher, proposed the idea of pluralism as an alternative in his essays *Democracy Versus the Melting Pot* (1915) and *Cultural Pluralism and the American Idea* (1956)
- the present concept is that of a '**salad bowl**', suggesting that the individual ingredients are clearly recognizable

Native Americans

Beginnings

- forced from their original habitations in the South and Northeast to Oklahoma, Arizona, Texas or New Mexico
- the oldest of ethnic literatures as to the **oral tradition** of individual tribes, the youngest to become published
- the natives used to have an inferior social status, their numerous different languages slowed down translations
- the first translations into English often lost the original onomatopoeic quality and the character of performance
- the most exploited genres are autobiographical prose, poetry and plays typically on tribal or personal history

Renaissance

- the Native American Renaissance (since 1960s) seeks to restore the oral tradition, transforming it into writing
- the literature is influenced in form and content by the oral tradition of tribe rituals, songs and creation stories
- the usual themes are exploration of the relationship to the **heritage of ancestors**, indictment of European and American imperialism and challenging the conventional myths about the Indians, including the Noble Savage
- frequent motifs are the figure of a trickster presented as a god, an animal or a human being endowed with supernatural power or the notion of **nonlinear time** as a cyclical repetition of the seasons and lives of ancestors

Leslie Marmon Silko (b. 1948)

Writing
Features

- a member of the Laguna Pueblo tribe, her parents descended from Laguna and Plains tribes mixed with whites
- the Laguna people were variously influenced by the cultures of neighbouring tribes and by Spanish colonizers, newcomers to the pueblo brought with them their own rituals and myths which were incorporated into Laguna
- the author registers the plural and changing nature of the ceremonies, she associates change with vital growth
- the essentials of a ritual are repetition and recurrence, a rhythm of **continuity and change** links word to world
- catches the native culture as continuous with language and landscape, perceives her world as 'made of stories'
- presents her fiction as a continuation of the oral tradition, renews and retells old tales and links past to present

Poetry
Collection

Laguna Woman (1974)

- her first published book, a poetry collection devoted mostly to the exploration of her Laguna Pueblo heritage

Fiction
Masterpiece

Ceremony (1977)

- a novel featuring a mixed-blood veteran of the Second World War who returns back to his tribe in New Mexico
- the protagonist feels dispossessed and disoriented, missing the sense of belonging to America he had in the war
- his home presents him with a disconcerting mix of the old and new, all things have a white and an Indian name
- there arises a tension between the new urban Indians and the perpetuation of ceremonies by the medicine men
- the protagonist feels sick and seeks advice from a medicine man, also of mixed origin, who instructs him in the ineluctable nature of the new and teaches him about ceremonies that will **accommodate change** and complexity

Hybrid
Culture

- dismisses the binary split of white against red, new against old, and invents a hybrid culture and hybrid rituals
- distinguishes between 'witchery' that treats the world as dead and ceremony through which the world is alive
- the symbol of witchery is the atomic bomb whose explosion was witnessed by the protagonist's grandmother⁵⁹, who sees the bomb as uniting humanity under the threat of annihilation and leading them to a **redemptive ritual**
- the protagonist finally experiences the redemptive ceremony, one which incorporates all into a vision of peace

Poetry
& Stories

Storyteller (1981)

- an interlinked collection of poems and short stories, including fictional stories, family stories and tribal tales
- contains also some of her most frequently anthologized short stories, for instance 'Yellow Woman' or 'Lullaby'

⁵⁹ The first atomic explosion occurred historically little more than a hundred miles from the habitation of the Laguna Pueblo people.

Louise Erdrich (b. 1954)

- Reservation Writing • a member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa in North Dakota, of mixed German and Chippewa origin
 • devoted much of her career to a tetralogy set on and around a fictional Chippewa **reservation** in North Dakota

Love Medicine (1984)

- Interwoven Narratives • a series of narratives told by various members of two families living on the reservation in 1970s and 1980s
 • the stories are free-standing but the fates of the narrators are intertwined, they appear in on another's stories
 • the narrators intermix humour and despair as they tell stories of survival, focusing in particular upon women

Story as History *The Beet Queen* (1986)

- the second novel of her tetralogy, spans over the period of forty years, taking in a large gallery of characters
 • begins with two children leaping from a boxcar, so becoming orphaned and seeking a refuge with their aunt
 • tells the tales of extraordinary people and does not hesitate to employ folktale, myth, ritual and magic realism
 • weaves the stories of several people together into one densely layered tapestry and also **links story to history**
 • relates what happens with her characters to the larger narratives of what goes on between Indians and whites

Native History *Tracks* (1988)

- the third novel of her tetralogy, powerfully forges a link between personal story and Native American history
 • opens with the challenge of white disease killing Native peoples, a paradigm of cultural invasion and crisis
 • shows the traumatic effects of epidemic disease, land loss, confinement on reservations, intertribal conflicts
 • illustrates the clash between those resistant to the assimilation pressures and those more positively responsive
 • presents history not as a singular objective narrative but rather as a multidimensional creation of various voices
 • structures the story around two alternating narrators, a conservative Chippewa man and a progressive woman of mixed Chippewa and white origin who denies her Indian identity and leaves the community to become a nun
 • the male storyteller, called Nanapush, recalls his life from the time when the Chippewa still lived freely off the land, hunting and gathering, living with the earth, to when they lived off government supplies on the reservation
 • conjures up the **animistic world** when people like Nanapush still resort to magic and medicine for guidance
 • Nanapush is a carrier of folktale and legend, linked by his name with a Chippewa trickster from oral stories
 • Nanapush serves as a government interpreter and mediator when he is young, later is elected tribal chairman
 • the novel tells a story of triumph not despite but through tragedy, **heroism of continuance** against all the odds

Native Present *The Bingo Palace* (1994)

- the fourth novel of her tetralogy, the title refers to a bingo parlour owned by a progressive Chippewa member
 • the protagonist is a young Chippewa man who has returned home from the city in search of a meaningful life
 • the novel shows the tensions created by the proposal of the bingo owner for the young man to invest with him
 • explores the difference between the solidity of ritual, ceremony and community and the abstractions of power
 • elaborates also on the traditional theme of perceiving the **land as an extension of being** rather than real estate

James Welch (1940–2003)

- Writing Features • a member of Blackfeet tribe, of mixed Blackfeet and Gros Ventre origin, brought up on a Montana reservation
 • develops a laconic, terse narrative style, tightly rhythmic and repetitive, marked by a bleak, oblique humour
 • recalls the early fiction of **Hemingway** with his style, tone and concentration on the mood rather than the plot
 • his four novels may be seen as a tetralogy which sets the pride of the Native American past against the pity of the present and which suggests that one small recompense in a world of drift and loss is a **recovery of ancestry**

Existential Feelings *Winter in the Blood* (1974)

- his first novel features a protagonist who is a drifter, marked by a haunting sense of **alienation** and loss, and who feels 'no hatred, no love, no guilt, no conscience, nothing but a distance that had grown through the years'

The Death of Jim Loney (1979)

- like the preceding novel presents a protagonist who had a promising athletic career in youth but now hardly lives his life and sees in his father what he might become himself, outsider living on the fringes of white culture
 • the estranged protagonists of both novels are aimless apathetic creatures seeking **relief in drink** and casual sex

Native History *Fool's Crow* (1986)

- the novel is set in the late nineteenth century in a **Blackfeet camp**, suffused with Indian custom and ceremony
 • retells an actual historical tale about the decline of tribal life through the title character, a young medicine man, who sees the danger posed by the whites and knows that his people must either wage a futile war or surrender

Cultural Division *Indian Lawyer* (1990)

- the novel shows a materially comfortable protagonist who made his escape from the poor life on a reservation
 • the protagonist moves between two worlds, one white and one Indian, feeling adrift and out of place in both

Asian Americans

- Immigration History • the first Asian immigrants came to the United State in the half of the nineteenth century, they were attracted at first by the Gold Rush and then by jobs available at railway constructions, settled mostly at the Western Coast
- welcomed by their employers as hard-working and loyal, but evoked **xenophobia** in the rest of the population
- the Nationality Act (1870) declared Asian Americans aliens, denied them civil rights and American citizenship
- the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) made marriages of Chinese American men to white American women illegal
- the Immigration and Nationality Act (1965) abolished the quotas restricting immigration from Asian countries
- Immigration Writing • Asian American literature was at first written in the original languages for audiences within their community
- includes mostly the Chinese and Japanese, but also writers with roots in Korea, the Philippines or South Asia
- Chinese and Japanese literature is the oldest within the Asian American context, other ethnics follow only later
- the first Chinese literature emerged in the San Francisco **China Town**, the largest Asian American community
- the most frequent subjects are China Town life, celebration of traditional Chinese culture, negative reactions against assimilation, chronicle of hard work and also rise of feminism among Chinese American women writers
- the first influential anthology of Asian writing was *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian American Writers* (1974) which aimed to shatter the stereotypical image of Asians as the exemplary minority that got easily assimilated

Maxine Hong Kingston (b. 1940)

- the author is a second-generation Chinese American who never saw China and knows it from her mother only
- Ethnic Growing-Up Novel • *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1975)
- her first book, an intentionally **hybrid form** with elements of memoir, autobiography, biography, myth, fiction
- recounts the childhood experiences of a young girl, mixing adolescent confusion and ironic adult commentary
- offers a feminist perspective, negotiating both the sexism of traditional China and the racism of white America, presents the young girl protagonist as caught up between her Chinese inheritance and her American upbringing
- separates the narrative into five sections, each following the development of the girl into the woman warrior
- tells in each section the story of a particular woman and maternal figure, an inspirational character who has a formative influence on the protagonist and who may be both actual and mythical, a ghostly and a real presence
- promotes a growth **from silence to speech**, discloses the necessity to speak oneself into being and into identity
- the narrator sifts through the cultural fragments she inherits through her mother and reinvents them for her own purposes, reinvigorates the ancient Chinese tradition by investing old stories with a liberating feminist bias
- Telling & Retelling • ‘No Name Woman’ opens the book and reveals the narrator’s aunt’s illegitimate pregnancy, shaming and suicide, told by the narrator’s mother as a cautionary tale and injunction against the passing on of familial shame
- the narrator reimagines her aunt’s story as an emancipatory narrative about a woman who had her vengeance on Chinese patriarchal culture and those who would shame her by casting her body into the family drinking well
- the family punishes the aunt by forgetting her existence, the narrator redresses the balance by telling about her
- ‘White Tigers’ revises the story of a woman warrior of ancient **Chinese legend**, told by the narrator’s mother, and attributes some of the exploits and experiences normally associated with male warriors to the female figure
- ‘A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe’ concludes the book, describes an actual historical figure of a woman who was captured and forced to live in the ‘barbarian’ lands where she heard a strange music produced on reed flutes
- the captured woman learned how to sing in a way that ‘matched the flutes’ and brought the songs back to home
- suggests that the solution to the problem of identity is not to collapse the differences but to accommodate them
- demonstrates how to find a refuge and redemption in telling, to make **words weapons** of the woman warrior
- Fathers & Daughters • *China Men* (1980)
- her second book, a similar hybrid like the preceding, draws on the imaginative revisioning of a historical fact
- draws also on family history in dealing with the uncommunicative relationship between father and daughter
- claims America for the Chinese by showing how deeply in debt the country is to the labour of Chinese men
- Chinese Whitman • *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* (1989)
- a novel in a fluid, evasive form, blurring the lines between naturalism and myth, the material and the magical
- recounts the exploits of Wittman Ah Sing, a ‘Chinese beatnik’, a contemporary incarnation of Walt **Whitman**
- refers to a Chinese classic about a magical and mischievous monkey accompanying a monk on a trip to India
- resists a monolithic notion of American identity, naming multiplicity as the core of personal and national self

Amy Tan (b. 1952)

- Children & Parents • the author is among the first generation of Chinese Americans to be born and brought up in the United States
- deals with bilingual and bicultural dilemmas and with the poignant relationship with one’s immigrant parents

The Joy Luck Club (1989)Mothers &
Daughters

- concentrates on the relationship of **mothers and daughters** as a measure of cultural changes and continuities
- a series of narratives telling about eight women, the four original members of the club and their four daughters
- the four mothers meet to devise their own moments of respite, gossip and anecdote around the mah-jong table
- the women meet every week even after their immigration to America and despite deprivation and devastation
- the mothers continue to commune, talk, praise and complain about their daughters until one of the mother dies

Generation
Contests

- the novel makes two complete rounds of the table and so explores the generational contests that form its core
- shows the mothers outraged by their daughters' independence and the daughters rebelling against obedience
- suggests that even the daughters have a sense of continuity and connection when one daughter travels to China after her mother's death, meets the twin daughters of her mother's first marriage and discovers her blood bonds
- the young woman learns to balance her competing identities by **retrieving the past**, the history of her mother

The Kitchen God's Wife (1991)Mothers &
Husbands

- the novel continues her explorations of mothers and daughters in narrating successively the stories of them all
- the title derives from a Chinese fable about an abusive husband who still became known as 'The Kitchen God'

Sisters

The Hundred Secret Senses (1995)

- the novel focuses on the relationship between **sisters**, one born still in China and the other already in America

(14) The Beat Generation

Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Charles Reznikoff,
Ted Berrigan, Timothy Leary, Charles Bukowski, Gary Snyder, Kenneth Rexroth

The San Francisco Renaissance

- Beatnik
Predecessors
- in the late 1940s and **1950s** the San Francisco Bay Area became the seat of avant-garde arts, especially poetry
 - the former culture centres in New England were abandoned by writers who sought a more liberal climate
 - the migration from the East to the West was complemented by a wave of immigrants from Asian countries
 - the San Francisco poets emerged as a **counter-culture** against the formalist and confessional establishments
 - their poetry emphasized drama and performance, language and line were shaped by the voice in conversation
 - represented by **Kenneth Rexroth** (1905–1982), **Robert Duncan** (1919–1988), **Gary Snyder** (b. 1930) etc.

The Beat Generation

- Meanings
of 'Beat'
- the term 'beat generation' seems to have been coined by Jack Kerouac and has several relevant connotations
 - in a musical sense 'beat' suggests keeping the beat in harmony with others, specifically implies the **jazz beat**
 - beat poetry was called 'typewriter-jazz', catching the abrupt syncopated rhythms of jazz, bebop and swing
 - in a social, psychological and vaguely political sense 'beat' suggests the **'beaten' condition** of the outsider
 - beat poetry cherishes the stance of the alienated, the dispossessed and even the nominally insane individual
 - in a spiritual sense 'beat' is related to **'beatitude'**, the innocence, blessedness and raptness of the generation
 - beat poetry seeks to pursue 'visionary consciousness' through music or meditation, drugs, mantras or poems
- Origins
& Views
- initially associated with New York, in the mid-1950s Kerouac, Ginsberg and Corso shifted to San Francisco
 - national prominence and notoriety was guaranteed by the confiscation of Ginsberg's *Howl* by police (1956)
 - harboured anti-establishment sentiments, rebelled against the bourgeois consumer society, sought liberalism
 - typically divided by a thin line between their own lives and the lives of their protagonist in social margins
 - formally not related to programmatic leftism, preferred **'metapolitics'**, psychological and spiritual freedom
 - influenced by Eastern philosophies and religions, drew heavily on the rhythms and improvisations of jazz
 - attracted to **visionary** poetry, influenced by William Blake, American Transcendentalists and Walt Whitman

Jack Kerouac (1922–1969)

- Writing
Mode
- his semi-autobiographical writings document the beat consciousness and his search for truth in **Zen Buddhism**
 - his writings share an urgent repetitive rhythmic style, an excited evocative tone and spontaneity and intimacy
 - his prose is inspired by the sheer vastness of the American continent, through which he travelled extensively
 - his poetry is influenced by the Japanese haiku⁶⁰, produces poetic miniatures describing the beauty of the nature

Novel On the Road (1957)

- Masterpiece
- the novel brings together the American self and American space in a celebration of the vast potential of both
 - the narrator and protagonist, Sal Paradise, the author's self-portrait, is a struggling writer in his mid-twenties
 - shows his encounters with the teenager Dean Moriarty, modelled on the Beat poet Neal Cassady (1926–1968)
 - includes also fictionalized figures of Allen Ginsberg and of the Beat novelist William Burroughs (1914–1997)
 - follows Sal and Dean travelling with or to each other, undertaking five trips from coast to coast in five years
 - in the course of the novel Dean meets and deserts different wives and lovers, Sal has a brief affair with one of Dean's partners and manages to sell his novel to a publisher, but nothing substantial happens in terms of plot
 - the events that occur and are described possess the fluidity of a stream rather than the fixity of narrative form
 - the narrative is focused on **experience** rather than evaluation, the characters keep on moving to new events
 - the experience is the love, loneliness and longing felt when they contemplate the boundless areas they move in
- Travels &
Experience

Novels The Subterraneans (1958), The Dharma Bums (1958), Visions of Cody (1972)

- the novels recollect the author's life and friends, the last mentioned his travelling companion Neal Cassady

Poetry Mexico City Blues (1959)

- a poetic sequence consisting of 242 stanzas dealing with various personal themes in a spontaneous language
- inspired by the blues poetics and the jazz improvisations, the title refers originally to a musical composition

Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997)

- Background
& Influences
- born in a Jewish family, influenced by the conservativeness of his father and the mental disease of his mother
 - rebelled against the conservative values, harshly criticised the pretentious society and the tricky governments

⁶⁰ The Japanese haiku comprises three lines of five, seven and five syllables respectively. It expresses a single idea, image or feeling.

Form & Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> influenced by the example of Walt Whitman (1819–1892) and advice of William Carlos Williams (1883–1963) followed William Blake's (1757–1827) mysticism and Henry David Thoreau's (1817–1862) civil disobedience drew on folk songs, jazz and blues, even recited his poems to rock music accompaniment, as by Bob Dylan made his breath the measure, 'one physical-mental inspiration of thought contained in the elastic of breath' recorded some of his 'mind-flow' poems directly on a tape-recorder rather than composing them on the page perceived poetry as 'a catalyst to visionary states of mind', sought to insert his prophetic vision in his poetry mixes the intimate and prophetic, comic and serious, seeks to celebrate and sing himself as representative man focuses on his own genuine feelings and emotions, opens taboo topics, including his homosexual inclination deals with people, places, politics, psychedelics, ecology, love, nature and war in an oracular, prophetic tone
Master-piece	<p><i>Howl and Other Poems</i> (1956)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the title poem is a litany, not an individual's cry but a lament over a whole generation destroyed by conformity the poem offers grimly serious, yet comically surreal improvisations on the theme of betrayal of a generation follows the Romantic tradition which sought to glorify the figures of outcasts, rebels, in this case drug addicts mixes religious intensity and wry realism, weaves modernist disjunctures with an ancient sense of apocalypse balances between acknowledgement of the grubby everyday life and proclamations of the presence of the ideal
Themes & Mood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the poet seeks to 'discover' the poem in his mind, copies the discontinuities and revelations of consciousness the opening lines establish the basic beat of the poem, and the anaphoric 'who' then helps to keep the measure the first part explores the denial of the visionary impulse by forces as 'the narcotic tobacco haze of Capitalism' and celebrates its continuance in such subversive elements as 'angel-headed hipsters' and 'the madman bum' the second part denounces in a prophetic tone 'Moloch the loveless', the god of power and 'pure machinery' the third part focuses on his friend Carl Solomon⁶¹, whom the poet identifies with as an archetype of suffering, and projects their imaginary liberation when they wake up to their 'own souls' airplanes roaring over the roof'
Form & Message	<p><i>Kaddish and Other Poems</i> (1961)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the title poem takes the traditional Hebrew form of an elegiac lament, gives a powerful account of personal grief over the death of his mother and includes an extremely frank portrayal of his mother's mental affliction
Elegy on Mother	<p><i>'Wichita Vortex Sutra'</i>⁶² (1966)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the poem denounces the Vietnam War, declares that 'the war is language' and that the Vietnam conflict is a product of the 'Black magic language' or 'formulas for reality' with which the corporate America blinds itself undertakes to construct a model of 'language known in the back of the mind', a true vocabulary for true vision presents the poem as 'the right magic', a new language of recovery to promote a new vision and a new society
Vietnam Protest	<p><i>Death and Fame: Poems 1993–1997</i> (1998)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the collection shows his gravitation to Buddhism, surveys his earlier nightmares with a sense of acceptance
Buddhist Calmness	<p>Gregory Corso (1930–2001)</p>
Poetry Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> his poetic persona stands apart from the game of life and refuses to commit himself to a fixed definite status refuses to be tied down by any institutions or poetic forms, whether it is metre, stability of mood or marriage characteristic for his subversive humour, unpredictable changes of pace and tone, fluid voice and rapid line resembles Allen Ginsberg's poetry with long forms and long lines, but unlike him uses playfulness and irony
Juvenilia Collection	<p><i>The Vestal Lady of Brattle</i> (1955)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> his first poetry collection, published due to funds from his fellow students at Harvard where he spent one year early pieces, but already show innovative use of jazz rhythms, cadences of spoken English and hipster jargon
Ginsberg Influence	<p><i>Gasoline</i> (1958)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> his second collection, published by Ferlinghetti's City Lights, with a foreword by his mentor Allen Ginsberg influenced by Ginsberg, but prefers his own swift and witty voice rather than a prophetically incantatory one
Masterpiece Collection	<p><i>Happy Birthday of Death</i> (1960)</p> <p><i>'Marriage'</i> (1959)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a witty meditation on whether to submit to convention and marry, suggesting rebellion rather than compliance the poem presents the speaker trying out possible marriages, inventing potential selves and discarding them all attacks traditional values but accepts the fact of their existence, unlike Ginsberg, who praised homoeroticism
Later Poetry	<p><i>Elegiac Feelings American</i> (1970)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> continues in his bitter-sweet tone of boyish rebellion, but since the 1970s becomes tainted by disillusionment

⁶¹ Carl Solomon (1928–1993), a minor American poet; Ginsberg befriended him during a brief stay at a mental institute in New York.

⁶² Wichita is a city in Kansas, which the author visited during his Mid-West travels. Sutra refers to canonical scriptures of Buddhism.

Lawrence Ferlinghetti (b. 1919)

- Views & Influences**
- a native of New York, in the early 1950s settled in San Francisco where he set up the **City Lights**⁶³ Bookshop (1953) and Press (1955), publishing avant-garde poetry in the Pocket Poets Series and in the *Beatitude* magazine
 - a representative of the San Francisco Renaissance and the Beat Generation, a poet, painter and liberal activist
 - argued for a populist **street poetry**, sought to get poetry out of the classroom and even **off the printed page**
 - concentrated on the voice, conceived many of his poems as oral messages performed to a jazz accompaniment
 - influenced by jazz improvisations and by French Surrealism, which he combined with a search for his identity
 - developed a cascade-like structure of the poem, similar to Charles Olson's (1910–1970) views of Projectivism
- Forms & Subjects**
- uses a variable foot, long and flowing line, strongly idiomatic language and colourful, even theatrical images
 - prefers roaming verse forms, declamatory style and devices as incremental repetition and paratactic syntax
 - indulges in **slapstick** and corny jokes but all the same insists on engagement with the serious **issues of the day**
 - speaks in the energetic voice of an anarchic individualist about the absurd institutional lives and nation-states
 - makes his poetry both public, in performance and subjects, and personal, in his private vision and experience
 - insists on the need for direct statement and clear responsibility in poetry, dismissed the nihilism of other beats
 - the poet is a performer, 'a charleychaplin man', and a pedagogue, a 'super realist', entertaining and instructing
- Poetry Collections**
- Pictures of the Gone World* (1955), *A Coney Island of the Mind* (1958), *Starting from San Francisco* (1961), *Where is Vietnam?* (1965), *The Secret Meaning of Things* (1969)

Charles Reznikoff (1894–1976)

- Background & Relations**
- born to Russian immigrant parents in a Jewish ghetto in Brooklyn, resided in New York almost uninterruptedly
 - started writing poetry remarkable for its Imagist intensity of vision, influenced by Ezra Pound (1885–1972)
 - produced 'urban imagism', pointing out the loneliness, ironies and numbness of an urban tenement immigrant
 - became the poet for whom the term '**Objectivism**' was first coined, the poet Louis Zukofsky (1904–1978) referred to Reznikoff's work in what became known as the Objectivist issue of Harriet's Munroe's *Poetry* (1931)
 - co-founded with Louis Zukofsky and George Oppen (1908–1984) the Objectivist Press to publish their work
- Imagist & Objectivist**
- By the Waters of Manhattan: Selected Verse* (1962)
- the best of his earlier poems refuse to moralize, the social comment is all the more powerful for being implicit
- Master-pieces**
- Testimony: The United States, 1885–1890* (1965), *Testimony: The United States, 1891–1900* (1968)
- began as prose retellings of court records that the author was hired to summarize for a legal publishing house
 - eventually elaborated into an extended free-verse poem that runs to some five hundred pages in two volumes
 - presented as a **found poem**, using the words of the participants, avoiding metaphor and authorial personality
 - believed that the chosen period was a time when a social and psychic crisis occurred in the American nation
 - suggested that every life was worth remembering, that the testimony of every person was worth attending to
 - omitted the judgements, focused rather on the stories and included all the raw detail he considered relevant
- Found Poems**
- Holocaust* (1975)
- based on the courtroom accounts of Nazi concentration camps, further developed his **prose-poem** technique

Ted Berrigan (1934–1983)

- Imitations & Parodies**
- the central figure of the second generation of New York School of Poets, founder and editor of the *C Magazine*
 - author of nearly two dozens volumes of experimental poetry, highly diverse in style but very often **parodic**
 - wrote often in collaboration, among his collaborators was the fellow New York poet Ron Padgett (b. 1942)
 - considered himself a 'late Beat', drew on the Expressionist tradition which grounds literary authority in the personality of the writer rather than traditional aesthetics and which was practised by the Transcendentalists
 - influenced especially by Frank O'Hara (1926–1966) whose '**I-do-this-I-do-that**' style he imitated or parodied
- Poetry of Self**
- presents the world in his poetry as an extended projection of his self, seeks to make his poems be like his life
 - focuses on effects drawn from the influences of surrealism, abstract **expressionist** painting and serial music
 - imitates the forms and practices of earlier poets and re-creates them to express his own personal experience
 - borrows procedures and even lines from other poets but always seeks to absorb them and make them his own
 - projects a sensibility that is confiding, sad, graceful and affectionate, closely resembling his own personality
- Master-piece**
- The Sonnets* (1964)
- weaves together traditional elements of the Shakespearean sonnet⁶⁴ with the disjunctive structure and cadences

⁶³ Called so for a Charlie Chaplin film of the name (1931). The books were published in paper-bound editions for anyone to afford.

⁶⁴ The Shakespearean sonnet is written in iambic pentameter and comprises three quatrains and a couplet rhyming abab cdcd efef gg.

of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) and with the author's own literary innovations and personal experiences

- replaces Eliot's characteristically wearied tone and sensibility with his own peculiar mix of humour and grace
- substitutes Eliot's quotations of canonical works of high culture by references to **popular culture** of the time

Drug
Life

Tambourine Life (1967)

- an extended poetic sequence in the Whitmanesque style, unified by a common theme and a consistent tone
- 'tambourine life' is 'drug life', the poem was composed by 'mushrooming technique', under drug intoxication
- opens with a centred line reading 'Fuck Communism', combines otherworldly surliness and baiting obscenity
- includes references to popular culture, like John Cage or the Marx Brothers, and **anti-establishment** slogans

Collaboration

Bean Spasms (1967)

- a medley of poems and prose pieces written with Ron Padgett, avoids specifying who contributed which pieces

Late
Poetry

In the Early Morning Rain (1970)

- marks a shift in his style towards a minimalist mode, tries to strip his poems of all but the most essential words

A Certain Slant of Sunlight (1988)

- poems written towards the end of his life, notable for their strong emotions and intricate, subtle modulations

Timothy Leary (1920–1996)

Career &
Activities

- psychologist, futurist, author of professional writing, advocate for the use of **LSD** and other psychedelic drugs
- raised in a Catholic household, attended the Military Academy at West Point and the University of Alabama
- received a doctorate in **psychology** from the University of California, Berkeley, where he became an assistant professor (1950–1955) and developed an egalitarian model for interaction between psychotherapist and patient
- appointed a lecturer in psychology at Harvard University (1959–1963), founded the Harvard Psychedelic Drug Research Programme and began controversial **experiments**, including administering drugs to graduate students

Research &
Conclusions

- experimented with psilocybin, a synthesized form of the hallucinogenic agent present in certain mushrooms
- his Concord Prison Experiment (1961–1963) suggested that psychedelic drugs could help reform criminals
- concluded that psychedelic drugs could be effective in transforming personality and **expanding consciousness**
- dismissed from Harvard, moved to New York where he became the centre of a small hedonistic community
- produced his book ***The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on The Tibetan Book of the Dead*** (1964)
- began experiments with LSD, initially with control over the 'set and setting', then increasingly undisciplined
- embarked on a chain of public lectures, his 'turn on, tune in, drop out' became a popular counter-culture slogan
- considered a corrosive influence on society, arrested for possession of marijuana resulting in a long legal battle
- in the 1990s became an early advocate of the potential of new technologies like virtual reality and the Internet

Charles Bukowski (1920–1994)

Position &
Influences

- the author served as a link between the San Francisco poets and Los Angeles, California, where he resided
- refused to be associated with the San Francisco or with the Beat Poets, stood outside as an **isolated individual**
- influenced by Henry Miller's (1891–1980) iconoclasm and Robinson Jeffers's (1887–1962) individualism
- began writing short stories that introduced a hard-boiled **rough loser** as the characteristic persona of his work
- started writing poetry only at thirty after having experienced the life of an outsider, alcoholic and drug addict

Subjects &
Approaches

- rebelled against the established traditional literature, mocked self-serious young poets and **wrote to amuse**
- produced raw autobiographical poetry poking fun at and criticizing the myth of success gained by hard work
- sang and celebrated himself in the whitmanesque manner, praised both beauty and ugliness without distinction
- intermixed **crude realism** with outrages of **surrealism**, concentrated on the content rather than on the form
- appreciated traditionally more in Europe rather than in America where his work is regarded as non-literature

Poetry

It Catches My Heart in Its Hands: New and Selected Poems 1955–1963 (1963); ***Mockingbird Wish Me Luck*** (1972); ***Horses Don't Bet on People and Neither Do I*** (1984) • poetry collections

Stories

All the Assholes in the World and Mine (1966); ***Notes of a Dirty Old Man*** (1969); ***Erections, Ejaculations, Exhibitions and General Tales of Ordinary Madness*** (1972) • short story volumes

Novels

Post Office (1971), ***Women*** (1978), ***Ham on Rye*** (1982) • novels

Gary Snyder (b. 1930)

Influences

- born in San Francisco, lived in different places at the Western Coast, including California, Washington, Oregon
- spent his youth in the mountains and forests of the Northwest, worked as a logger, forest ranger and seaman
- studied anthropology, later Japanese and Chinese, lived several years in Zen **Buddhist** monasteries in Japan

Ecology & Philosophy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> influenced by Ezra Pound, Charles Olson and Kenneth Rexroth, but soon formed his own vision and technique preoccupied with ecological and environmental themes, produces predominantly poetry of natural observation resembles Robinson Jeffers with his inhuman poetry and Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) with philosophy differs from Jeffers in not taking a misanthropic view of men and from Thoreau in his calm and restrained tone shows a humanistic attitude and an interest in Eastern philosophies and ancient cultures, as American Indians accepts the fact of American cultural plurality and explores its history as far as to Native American mythology praises the essential in human existence, writes what is perhaps the finest ‘poetry of and for the common man’
Poetry Volume	<p><i>Riprap</i> (1959)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> his first poetry collection, the title refers to stones laid on steep rocks to make a trail for horses in mountains the title poem suggests a link between poetry and artificial paths, both are based on nature but must be adapted
Pulitzer Winner	<p><i>Turtle Island</i> (1974)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> this Pulitzer-Prize winning volume is called for the name of the American continent in Indian creation myths

Kenneth Rexroth (1905–1982)

Position & Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> considered the father figure of the San Francisco Renaissance, acted as mentor and promoter of younger poets laid the groundwork for the San Francisco Renaissance by holding a weekly salon for philosophy and poetry organized and emceed the legendary Six Gallery reading (1955) at which Allen Ginsberg introduced his <i>Howl</i> held anti-establishment and anti-government views, associated himself with left-wing artists and intellectuals
Views & Works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> criticised the east-coast literary establishment and the then fashionable academic formalist impersonal poetry worked hard on self-education but deliberately chose to write as differently as possible from traditional poetry developed his own poetics making use of colloquial language, spontaneous expression and narrative impulses produced a large body of literary and cultural criticism testifying his familiarity with the world and extensive self-education, besides original poetry produced many volumes of translations of Chinese and Japanese poetry
Poetry Volumes	<p><i>In What Hour</i> (1940)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> his first poetry collection articulated the author’s ecological sensitivities along with his political convictions
Nature & Love	<p><i>The Phoenix and the Tortoise</i> (1944)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> his second collection continued his exploration of the natural and the erotic, presented his pacifist stance on the Second World War and expanded his range with poems concerning world religions and the history of philosophy incorporates numerous references to the work of classical poets and philosophers from the East and the West develops his view of love for another person as a sacramental act that could connect one with a transcendent universal awareness, perceived love as a key to truly realizing his existence, as shown in his erotic love poems
Californians v. Greeks	<p>‘Vitamins and Roughage’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the poem shows California beech sports while interspersing the lines with allusions to ancient Greek thinkers the Greeks met both intellectual and physical education, the Californians meet but one of these requirements

(15) Poetry Developments After 1945

A. R. Ammons, Philip Levine, Adrienne Rich, James Wright,
John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, Frank O'Hara, Cynthia MacDonald

Transitional Poets

Various
Poets

- a convenient label for otherwise very diverse poets who were born mostly in the 1920s, started publishing Formalist Academic poetry in the 1950s and turned to free verse forms and more adventurous subjects only later

A(rchie) R(andolph) Ammons (1926–2001)

Cosmos
& Man

- born in North Carolina, but does not show the Southern obsession with the psychological aftermath of history
- stands closer to the New England **Transcendentalist**, at times even refers to lines from Emerson and Whitman
- believes that verse lines serve only to trigger to the readable surface the poetic images inherently present there
- writes as a poet of the mind, deals with the cosmos and man, with linguistics and words in reference to things

Science
& Nature

- produces **metaphysical** poetry focused on penetrating the surfaces and exploring the mystery of all existence
- studied zoology, which is reflected in his concern with science and nature and in some of his specific imagery
- employs numerous professional terms from biology, geology, chemistry and physics, uses many abstract terms
- published prolifically, but did not achieve wider recognition until the publication of his *Selected Poems* (1968)

Poetry
Volumes

Ommateum (1955)

- his first collection introduced what was to become his theme of putting off the flesh and taking on the universe
- the title is a zoological term for compound eye, as of insects, and implies a praise of a complex view of nature

Corsons Inlet (1965)

- the title poem is a meditation occasioned by a walk in sand dunes, links the act of walking to that of writing

Sphere: The Form of a Motion (1974)

- the title of the collection refers to the author's conviction that **development** is the invariable constant of being
- the nature richly reflects the laws of existence and abounds in non-linear shapes like circles, ovals or spheres
- the poems exploit the colon as the most frequent punctuation symbol, suggesting the continuity of utterance

Philip Levine (b. 1928)

Outsider
Position

- born in Detroit, Michigan, to a Jewish Russian immigrant family, his home city figures in much of his writing
- started writing in the Formalist Academic mode, did not lack formal skills but failed to appeal to the audience
- turned to free verse forms and eventually mastered an **anarchic** poetry charged with raw energy and emotions
- defies classification with any poetic school, acts as a bard of underprivileged working class **losers** and failures

City
Losers

- expresses anger with and hatred for institutions as well as sympathy with and affection for simple poor people
- resembles Walt Whitman (1819–1892) with his subject matter and colloquial language, but lacks his optimism
- produces **urban poetry** concentrated on the dark aspects of the city, its violence, frustrations, pain and sadness
- presents defeated characters who however do not immerse in defeatist moods, keep on going, never giving up
- becomes more personal and intimate throughout the 1970s, renders his own history as archetypal experience

Academic

On the Edge (1963)

- his first poetry collection uses conventional verse form, metre, rhyme and stanza patterns, but radical content
- the title poem shows his penchant for using the names of famous people, in this case Edgar Allen Poe, and attributing them to working-class characters who have failed in their lives and offer a record of their frustrations

Open-Form

Not This Pig (1968)

- the collection marks a shift towards loose forms serving to capture a momentary mood or to dramatize a story

Pig Speaker

'Animals Are Passing From Our Lives'

- the poem is written in **syllabic verse** and assumes the voice of a pig to be slaughtered and processed for meat
- the pig on its way to the slaughterhouse comments on society, criticizing its consumerism and conformism

Anarchic

They Feed They Lion (1972)

- the title poem is written in free verse and working-class dialect, inspired by **racial riots** in Detroit in the 1960s
- the growing lion symbolizes the rising anger of the discriminated minorities which resorted to violent protests
- the poem effectively builds up a dramatic tension, using anaphoric repetitions, to relieve the energy at the end

Personal

One for the Rose (1981)

- the title poem traces the return of the speaker to a once familiar place to find it utterly changed and frustrating, the speaker is very un-American in his admitting his failure and showing the suffocation of isolated small towns

Adrienne Rich (b. 1929)

Develop- ments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • began in the Formalistic mode in the 1950s, influenced by W. H. Auden, William Butler Yeats or John Donne • turned to free verse in the 1960s to accommodate her dynamic identity of a woman, wife, mother and feminist • moved towards lesbian sensibility in the 1970s, after the breakdown of her marriage followed by the suicide of her husband, rejected her heterosexual identity in order to remedy the patriarchal evil in the American society
Academic	<p><i>A Change of the World</i> (1951)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • her first collection proves her mastery of conservative forms but already contains germs of feminist sensibility <p>‘Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the poem portrays a woman oppressed by the burden of her marriage but still knitting a pattern of wild tigers
Feminist	<p><i>Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law</i> (1963)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • her groundbreaking collection written in loose forms and personal tone, focused on the experience of women • the title poem contains ten sections which record the history of patriarchal oppression, playing on chauvinistic quotations of western literature classics and introducing a new woman who defies her role as dictated by society
Deep Image	<p><i>Diving into the Wreck</i> (1973)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • winner of the National Book Award (1974), accepted it not as a personal honour but as a homage to all women • the title poem describes both a physical diving into the sea and a spiritual descent into the depths of one’s soul, portrays the speaker merging both the male and female elements into a unique imaginary androgynous identity <p>‘A Valediction Forbidding Mourning’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the poem undermines the original version written by the seventeenth-century metaphysical poet John Donne, portrays the breakdown of communication in a relationship, reflecting the tension in nervous fragmentary syntax
Language Barrier	<p><i>The Dream of a Common Language</i> (1978)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the collection focuses on the language which sets up a barrier for women in the public and private sphere alike

James Wright (1927–1980)

Earlier Stages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • born in the Midwest to working-class parents, which shows in his sympathy for the stricken and impoverished • started with Formalistic Academic poetry indebted to the neoclassical and romantic tradition of English poets • underwent a development from closed to freer forms, from general to more personal and subjective themes • preoccupied with pastoral America, wrote predominantly nature poems, country poems or small-town poems • exploited the device of epiphany, concluded some of his poems with a surprising or even shocking revelation
Later Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • produced also condensed philosophical and meditative prose poems, which was a favourite mode in the 1970s • translated Spanish poetry, as by Pablo Neruda (1904–1973), and the Austrian poet Georg Trakl (1887–1914), who helped him define the ‘deep image’ concept of poetry which opens doors ‘into unused parts of the brain’ • collaborated on translations with Robert Bly, whose work similarly explores the concept of deep image poetry
Poetry Volumes	<p><i>The Branch Will Not Break</i> (1963)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • his groundbreaking collection which marks his rejection of formalism and shift to a more spontaneous poetry • the language becomes more natural, the voice more immediate and the penetration into layers of reality deeper • the collection includes his famous ‘Lying in a Hammock...’ ending with the revelation ‘I have wasted my life’ <p><i>Shall We Gather at the River</i> (1968), <i>Collected Poems</i> (1971), <i>Moments of the Italian Summer</i> (1976)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the volume of collected poems won the author official recognition by being awarded the Pulitzer Prize (1972)

The New York School

Painting & Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a loose group of New York avant-garde painters, musicians and poets prominent from the 1950s to mid-1960s • influenced by contemporary American arts, by abstract expressionism in pictorial arts and avant-garde music • influenced also by European avant-garde arts, especially French, by movements like surrealism and dadaism • inspired by the modernist poetry of William Carlos Williams (1883–1963) and Wallace Stevens (1879–1955) • rebelled against the established tradition of Academic Formalism and the Eliotic impersonality of Modernism • resembled somewhat the Beats, but unlike them fought against the cultural rather than political establishment • preoccupied with mixing of the high and low culture and writing as a creative process with uncertain results
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John Ashbery (b. 1927)

Inspirations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interested in all forms of art, painted and composed music, both of these influences are reflected in his poetry • studied and translated French literature, spent a decade in France where he worked as an art critic for journals • enjoys the reputation of a determinedly avant-garde poet who is original sometimes to the extent of obscurity
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Relations

- rejects the Whitmanesque openly personal mode, prefers the apparently outwardly impersonal mode of writing
- discards a mimetic representation of reality, captures the **fleeting nature** of reality that is impossible to grasp
- employs surrealism and dream logic, challenges the meaning of his lines by using unexpected irrational shifts
- uses the **words abstractly**, as an abstract painter uses paint, his lines stand simply as evidence of their creation
- seeks to approximate the quality of music which is convincing merely through the structure, not the meaning
- offers a series of unconnected fragments that are difficult to related to one another rather than coherent poems
- experiments with shifting the subjects of poetry and with the notion of poetry as an unfinished creative process
- attempts to record the process of the **acting mind**, constantly questions the way in which we perceive reality
- challenges the language by placing phrases of street talk, popular culture or poetry clichés into new contexts

Collections

***Some Trees* (1956)**

- his first published poetry collection, the title poem presents a meditation on silent, unmoved and grave trees

***Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* (1975)**

- the collection first won him a wider acclaim, received both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award
- the title poem compares the author's vision of reality to a ping-pong ball dancing on top of a water fountain

***Houseboat Days* (1977), *As We Know* (1979), *Shadow Train* (1981)**

- the last collection was initially announced as 'Paradoxes and Oxymorons' for one of the poems included in it

Kenneth Koch⁶⁵ (1925–2002)Comic &
Serious

- studied literature at Harvard University, Massachusetts, where he befriended John Ashbery and Frank O'Hara
- the most exuberantly witty representative of the New York Poets, unjustly dismissed by critics as '**light verse**'
- the comic surfaces of his poems often serve only as a cloak for exploration of serious philosophical questions
- an influential and inspiring literature and creative writing tutor, moulded a whole generation of younger poets
- himself influenced by his reading of French avant-garde writing and fascination by American popular culture
- wrote small-scale miniature lyrics, long epic poems in the Whitmanesque tradition as well as poetry **parodies**

Poetry
Volumes***Permanently* (1960)**

- the title poem of the collection is a strikingly original love poem and a meta-linguistic poem on parts of speech

***Thank You and Other Poems* (1962)**Against
Academics**'Fresh Air'**

- the poem is a grotesque rant rebelling against the obsolete conservative academic approach to poetry writing
- consists of a speech of a young radical at a poetry society meeting who calls in vain for fresh air for poetry
- introduces the character of the Strangler who haunts the country and kills conservative poets, bids goodbye to the poetry muse in the shape of Helen of Troy and finally calls for a biblical flood to purge the literary scene
- the poem manifests the author at his best when he transforms extremism and hatred into harmless **clowning**

Parody
Poem**'Variations on a Theme by William Carlos Williams'**

- the poem is a series of four brilliant parodic variations using the formula of Williams's 'This is Just to Say'

Painting
Parallels***When the Sun Tries to Go On* (1969)**

- an extended poem of a hundred stanzas which explores linguistic parallels to abstract expressionist painting

Later
Poetry***Girl and Baby Florist Sidewalk Pram Nineteen Seventy Something* (1980)**

- the title poem of the volume playfully deals with the language of relations, formulating and reformulating it

Frank O'Hara (1926–1966)Paintings
& Poems

- the author was actively involved with New York fine arts scene and acquainted with many artistic personalities
- worked as assistant curator in the Museum of Modern Art where he organized exhibitions of contemporary art
- produced also book-length studies on the paintings of *Jackson Pollock* (1959) and *Robert Motherwell* (1965)
- uses techniques and vision of modernist painters and sculptors, seeks to create the **effect of painting** on canvas
- fills his poetry with **visual objects** taken from city streets and interiors to recreate the reality of the metropolis
- humanizes the city with his all-pervasive presence, feels a firm part of the concreteness and liveliness the city

New York
Man's Life

- uses himself not as a poetry subject but an instrument, tries both to take a distance and to identify with his city
- examines the mythical dimension of **modern consciousness** as represented by celebrities, movies and dreams
- wrote many occasional poems to friends and lost sight of them, many poems were found only after his death
- his '**Personim: A Manifesto**' (1959) is a mock-serious assertion of personal contact preferable to printed page
- his *Collected Poems* (1971) is a volume of more than five hundred pages, scrupulously edited by Donald Allen

⁶⁵

The author's last name is supposed to be pronounced in the same way as 'coke', that is America's most popular national beverage.

- Poetry Volumes ***Oranges*** (1953)
- an early volume of **prose poems**, their origin is later wittily dealt with in the poem 'Why I Am Not a Painter' which points out parallels between painting and poetry writing and contrasts the initial idea the the final result
- Mayakovsky ***Second Avenue*** (1960)
- a long poem issued as a pamphlet, dedicated to the memory of Vladimir Mayakovsky, who influenced the poet
- Casual Poems ***Lunch Poems*** (1964)
- the collection derives its name from the author's ability to produce spontaneously, as during his lunch break
 - includes 'A Step Away from Them', a poem tracing the speaker's way through city streets to have his lunch
 - also includes 'The Day Lady Died', a poem recording the feelings on the death of the singer Billie Holiday

Deep Image School

- Influences & Figures
- the origins of the movement are associated with the Midwestern poetry magazine ***Fifties*** (1958, subsequently *Sixties* and *Seventies*) edited by **Robert Bly** who advocated translations of Latin American and European poetry
 - promoted the Spanish poetry of Pablo Neruda (1904–1973) and Federico García Lorca (1898–1936), the Austrian poets Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926) and Georg Trakl (1887–1914) as well as French Decadent poets
 - in their emphasis on poetry in translations followed Ezra Pound's expatriate search for usable tradition abroad
 - as other movements of the time refused both Academic Formalism and the Eliotic impersonality of Modernism
 - represented by **W(illiam) S(tanley) Merwin** (b. 1927), **Galway Kinnell** (b. 1927), **James Wright** and others
- Jungian Archetypes
- the movement was prominent in the **1960s**, it was dissolved by the 1970s when the poets turned to other modes
 - attempted to descend into the collective unconsciousness, exploited the notion of an universal **archetypal self**
 - centred the poems around deep images which they expected to evoke certain shared stereotypical associations
 - drew images out of the bottomless abysses of one's deepest self, sought to present original **primaevial images**
 - employed **surrealist** methods, produced strictly nonmimetic, irrational, vague and often impenetrable poetry
 - nicknamed a school of 'stones, bones and silence', other favourite images were light, blood, breath and water

Robert Bly (b. 1926)

- Inspirations
- comes from the western plains of Minnesota, and the **rural experience** became a fruitful source for his poetry
 - protests again 'the destructive motion outward' in American poetry and calls for the 'plunge inward' instead
 - attempts an imaginative intensity with a 'swift movement all over the psyche, from conscious to unconscious'
 - draws his poetry from his individual experience of nature but also from his exploration of **history** and **politics**
 - became a co-founder of American Writers Against the Vietnam War (1966) and an activist defying the drafts
 - published a book on masculinity, *Iron John* (1990), and became a leader of the Mythopoetic Men's Movement

- Collections
- Silence in the Snowy Fields*** (1962)
- his first volume made him a spokesman for the Deep Image School, though he never produced any manifesto
 - **'Driving Toward the Lac Qui Parle River'**
 - the poem contrasts the small enclosed world of the car which the speaker drives and the larger world outside
 - the name of the river is also the name of the poet's hometown in Minnesota through which the speaker drives

The Light Around the Body (1967)

- the collection won him a National Book Award (1968), the author donated the money to anti-draft activities

James Dickey (1923–1997)

- Modes
- born in Atlanta, Georgia, received his education at Vanderbilt University, formerly the cradle of New Criticism
 - disposed of the academic heritage of New Critics, inclined to Whitmanesque forms and **transcendental** modes
 - considered language as too much a form of energetic action to be meticulously shaped into a well-made poem
 - believed in letting the material of the poem come spontaneously to the surface, preferred 'un-well-made' forms
- Poetry
- Into the Stone*** (1960), ***Drowning with Others*** (1962), ***Buckdancer's Choice*** (1965)
- his earliest poetry collections, the last of the three mentioned won him reputation and a National Book Award
- Fiction
- Deliverance*** (1970)
- a novel, made into a film two years later, a violent adventure story turned into a modern allegorical fantasy

Feminist Poetry

- History
 - poetry written by female authors lacked any continuous tradition to follow at least until the 1950s or the 1960s
 - the poetesses published earlier were viewed as rarities, as Anne Bradstreet, Phyllis Wheatley, Emily Dickinson
 - the first early wave of women poets arrived with the Modernists, as Gertrude Stein, Marianne Moore or H.D.
 - feminist poetry was enabled with women gaining the right to vote (1920) and to be admitted to universities
 - earlier female poets were restricted by the patriarchal order, suffered from **'double-bind'**, that is they sought to find a specifically female voice but were reduced to using typically male aggressive methods in order to succeed
- Present
 - the earlier poets who wished to present the realities of a woman's experience had to resort to subtle metaphors, only the Women's Liberation Movement helped introduce specifically **female subjects** which used to be taboo
 - since the 1950s there appear subjects as sexual harassment, menstruation, domestic violence, lesbianism etc.
 - since the late 1960s and 1970s there is a rise of radical feminist poetry written by women of **ethnic minorities**
 - the representatives are the Jewish American leftist poet **Muriel Rukeyser** (1913–1980), the African American radical militant feminist **June Jordan** (1936–2002) or the Asian American poet publishing as **Ai** (1947–2010)

Cynthia MacDonald (b. 1928)

- Influences & Modes
 - began her varied artistic career as a concert and opera singer, which is reflected in the musicality of her verse
 - turned to poetry writing on the advice of Anne Sexton, originally for therapeutic purposes in moments of crisis
 - influenced by Emily Dickinson, inspired also by modernist arts, in particular by surrealism and expressionism
 - explores the suffering and pain of human life in a sardonic, often **flippant tone**, shows a dark sense of humour
 - employs a **grotesque imagery** to comment on the mundane, uses transformed objects in dream-like sequences
- Collections
 - Amputations*** (1972)
 - her first poetry volume uses unnerving imagery and lively wordplay and exploits her fascination with 'freaks'
 - each poem in the volume shows a character with missing body parts, symbolizing inner losses of love and life
 - Transplants*** (1976)
 - her second collection marks a shift in tone, the characters and voices seem to be more substantial and complex
 - (W)holes*** (1980)
 - the collection is dominated by a poetic sequence called **'Burying the Babies'**, which interweaves quotations of various prose and poetry lines by other writers and the poet's original lines, marked by a feminist sensibility

(16) Confessional Poetry

Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Theodore Roethke, John Berryman

Confessional Poetry

Origins & History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the most influential movement in poetry after the Second World War, prominent in the late 1950s and beyond the term was first used by M. L. Rosenthal in his review of Robert Lowell's (1917–1977) <i>Life Studies</i> (1959) confessional approaches are represented in history for instance by Sappho, St Augustine, William Wordsworth Walt Whitman (1819–1892) used a first-person speaker, though as a poetic persona rather than his own person Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) predicted and defined confessional poetry in his essay 'The Poet' (1844)
Shared Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the confessional poets are not associated with any central leading figure or any formally declared manifesto share their preoccupation with their personal lives, especially under the stressing circumstances of a life crisis describe their own private suffering to make it universally shared, often drawing a parallel to a crisis of nation give an autobiographical impression, which it often is, but also often render fiction as if it were autobiography focus on developing the content rather than elaborating the form of a poem, prefer open forms and free verse
Subjects & Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> write highly subjective poetry, offer an expression of personality rather than an eliotic impersonal withdrawal regard poetry writing as an act of purifying self-therapy, focus on sick, imbalanced and suffering protagonists favour narrative poetry, employ irony and understatement to gain detachment of the author from the subject abolish taboos and obstacles between the poet and the audience, discuss freely suicide, alcoholism, perversion tend to express defiance of the establishment, present isolated protagonists often suffering from estrangement
Representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> represented by Randall Jarrell (1914–1965), John Berryman (1914–1972), Elizabeth Bishop (1911–1979) many confessional poets were subjected to depressive illness and many of them committed suicide, including Sylvia Plath (oven gas poisoning), Anne Sexton (car gas poisoning) and John Berryman (jumping off a bridge)

Sylvia Plath (1932–1963)

Relation of Life & Art	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> married the British poet Ted Hughes (1930–1998), had two children and was left by him for another woman attempted suicide several times, eventually killed herself within a year after the separation from her husband concerned with pain generating an impulse towards oblivion, compels the reader to participate in her despair rendered her private suffering in inimitably brutal ways, both daringly and deliberately, but with poetic craft explained that she drew on her experience but sought to manipulate it with an informed and intelligent mind proved her capability to fabricate a larger historical meaning and an imaginative myth out of personal horror organized her ultimate personal confessions into highly disciplined, intricate, meaningful art, with references operating within a wide symbolic framework including the war, history, politics, her family or Christian myths
Poetry Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> draws on honoured literary traditions, including the Puritan habit of meditation upon last things, the American compulsion to confront the abyss of the self and the conviction that imagining death is the definite experience shapes her poetry around stark and elevated imagery of the sea, fire, moon, whiteness and silence, suggesting the purifying nature of oblivion, against figures of domesticity and violence, associated with the pains of living shows wry tenderness and wonder in poems on the affections tying us to this world, as 'Morning Song' on the birth of her daughter, or corrosive wit in poems on the false self constructed by the world, as 'The Applicant' employs a rapt and bardic tone singed by the fire of prophecy in poems concentrating on the ambiguous nature of death, as 'Death & Co.', or poems on perfecting the self in the experience of dying, as 'Fever 103' or 'Edge'
Poetry Collection	<p><u>The Colossus</u> (1960)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the only poetry collection to be published during her lifetime, notable for its characteristic controlled intensity, precise imagery, fresh metaphors and the haunted tone of an outwardly successful but privately suffering woman
Novel of Confession	<p><u>The Bell Jar</u> (1963)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> her only novel, a semi-autobiographical writing published originally under the pseudonym of Victoria Lucas
Poetry Masterpiece	<p><u>Ariel</u>⁶⁶ (1965)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a posthumous collection of her latest poems, record her unbearable suffering and awareness of an early death the poems were written in the last year of her life, collected and edited by her husband and literary executor
Horse	<p>'Ariel'</p>

⁶⁶ 'Ariel' is Hebrew for the 'lion of God', an authority over the Earth and its Elements, an angel of healing, wrath and creation; or, the name of the author's horse; or, the airy spirit in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* which helps its master Prospero control fire and air.

- Riding
- the title poem describes seemingly a simple morning ride on the horse of the name that the author owned while she lived in England, but her heightened consciousness turns the most peaceful imagery into pictures of violence
- ‘**Elm**’
- Elm Tree Speaking
- the poem employs images of country life turned **antipastoral**, spoken by an elm tree obsessed with destruction
- ‘**Tulips**’
- Hospital Ward Stay
- the poem originated in a personal experience when the poet was taken into hospital following her miscarriage
 - projects the surroundings into her thoughts, beginning with the hospital ward and continuing with the flowers
 - describes the feelings of peace and release evoked by the whiteness, snow-like purity and light of the hospital in near sacramental terms, turns this experience into a mysterious initiation, into a **dying away from the world**
 - surrenders her identity that imprisons her in existence, sinks into a condition of utter emptiness associated with immersion in water, suggesting a return to the foetal state and the matrix of being, gives up her body and her life
 - feels disturbed by the picture of her husband and children with ‘little smiling hooks’ to fish her out of the sea
 - perceives the gift of red tulips as a threat to her peace, associates them with noise and pressure that draw her back to life and to her responsibilities as wife and mother, feels watched by the tulips, committed to a role in life
 - juxtaposes images of imprisonment and escape, the red blood of life and the white salt sea of death at the end
- ‘**Daddy**’
- Jew v. Nazi Relation
- the poem is purportedly ‘spoken by a girl with an Electra complex’, based on the author’s own ambivalent relationship with her father and her tendency to recreate aspects of that relationship in later adult relationships
 - the speaker is a thirty-year-old woman coping with communication problems with her late authoritative father, transforms private suffering into a public drama by thinking herself into being Jew and her father a Nazi officer
 - the author appropriates the facts of her life into a poetic litany of love and hate, the facts being the death of her father when she was still a young girl and her suicide attempt, the fiction being the persona of a Nazi victim
 - builds a tension in the narrator’s attitude to her father and other men, between fear and desire, resentment and tenderness, **detestation and adoration of the victim for the victimizer**, distaste and attraction to the life drama
 - renders the horrors of personal and general history in terms of fairytale and folk story, invokes nursery rhymes, employs a manic gaiety in tone which is at odds with the bleak content and produces a curiously hypnotic effect
- ‘**Lady Lazarus**’
- Art of Dying
- the poem is spoken by ‘a woman who has the great and terrible gift of being reborn’, only she has to die first
 - the speaker figures as ‘the phoenix, the libertarian spirit’ and ‘also just a good, plain, very resourceful woman’
 - evokes the mythical cycle of **death and rebirth**, claims dying to be an art which she does ‘exceptionally well’

Anne Sexton (1928–1974)

- Life & Art Inspiration
- attended like Sylvia Plath creative writing courses led by Robert Lowell at Boston University, Massachusetts
 - started writing on the advice of a therapist when she was treated for clinical depression and suicidal thoughts
 - founded an informal poetry group including poets George Starbuck (1931–1996) or Maxine Kumin (b. 1925)
 - collaborated with Maxine Kumin, the Jewish American feminist poet and writer, on several children’s books
 - drew inspiration for her topics from her **psychiatric ward stays**, as reflected in the title of her first collection
 - admitted that she employed **invention** in her poetry, which is confessional but not necessarily autobiographical
- Poetry Features
- employs an intensely personal stance, even poems seemingly not about herself usually turn out to be subjective
 - uses a painfully raw open tone which is given a further edge by elaborate **rhyme scheme** or tight **stanza form**
 - juxtaposes painful emotions in contrast to a conservative emphasis on rhyme, alliteration and a detached tone
 - pioneered formerly **taboo topics**, for instance suicide, depression, masturbation, sexual perversion and others
 - focuses on the pain of being daughter, wife, mother and lover, also sings ‘in celebration of the woman’ she is
 - writes often in **praise of her distinctive identity**, not just as an American poet, but an American female poet
- To Bedlam and Part Way Back** (1960)
- First Collection
- her first collection won her immediate attention for its honest portrayal of a nervous breakdown and recovery
 - includes intensely personal and relentlessly honest self-revelatory poetry in both sardonic and vulnerable tone
- ‘**Her Kind**’
- Witch Kind
- the poem expresses through its speaker the feelings that nobody understands her, compares herself to a witch
- All My Pretty Ones** (1962)
- Second Collection
- the collection further develops the confessional mode, interrelates the poems by recurrent themes and symbols
 - the title poem is addressed to the author’s father, exacerbates the intense mixture of love and hatred to her father by contrasting the passion and intimacy of the address with the strictness of the given measure of the form
- ‘**The Truth the Dead Know**’

Parents'
Deaths

- the poem tries to come to terms with the deaths of the author's parents that followed closely one upon another
- Live or Die*** (1966)

Pulitzer
Collection

- the collection explores topics like suicide, crucifixion or the death of others, won her the Pulitzer Prize (1967)
- Transformations*** (1971)
- an original recreation of several traditional fairy tales and the related myths of the female and male principles

Fairytale
Retelling

Theodore Roethke (1908–1963)

Life & Art
Influences

- spent his boyhood years on the twenty-five acres of greenhouses jointly owned by his father who was a florist
- influenced the **horticultural imagery** and the perceptive scrutiny of nature which emerge throughout his work
- grew up in the Midwest, which is reflected in his concern with the frontiers of existence, the sources of being
- qualifies as a poet of nature, though not in the traditional sense, as a poet of the unconscious and a dream poet
- produced poetry in **strict forms** in **rational** modes of thought and poetry in **free verse** in **surrealistic** modes
- began as a formalist poet, made use of traditional verse structures and the then fashionable intellectual modes
- preoccupied with the evolution and identity of the self, his later poetry gets however more mystical and vaguer

Open House (1941)

Exposing
One's Self

- the title poem of his first collection declares the author's intention of using **himself as the material** of his art
- produces tight and epigrammatic verses employing stripped and bare language, driving and insistent rhythms

The Lost Son and Other Poems (1948)

Exploring
One's Roots

- his second collection **returns to his boyhood** and starts a search for the subrational prehistorical roots of being
- compares the birth and growth of consciousness to the birth and growth of plants, trees and all organic matter
- roots the poems in sensuous experience, in the 'greenhouse' world or natural landscape of the poet's childhood
- begins with a primitive journey into the interior of the natural order and into himself as part of that order, uses a more primitive voice resembling prose so as to comply to his concern 'with more primitive effects in poetry'
- uses a long free-verse line, elaborately alliterated and with heavy stresses to suggest an evolutionary struggle
- seeks not to impose order on conscious or subconscious experience but rather to discover the order latent in it
- gravitates towards a more subliminal language, the intuitions of folklore, fairytale, myth and shared archetypes
- the title poem juxtaposes original free verse lines and petrified forms of children's sayings, puzzles or songs

'Child on Top of a Greenhouse'

Child's
Confession

- the poem introduces the original subject matter of a confession given from the limited point of view of a child

Praise to the End! (1951)

Collective
Memory

- his third collection travels beyond childhood and the natural world for the unknown territory of racial memory
- journeys backward into **unindividuated experience** that then becomes part of an evolutionary process forward

'Unfold! Unfold!'

Primeval
Journey

- the poem is modelled on the archetypal pattern when the heroic protagonist travels into a nightworld, conquers the dangers he meets and returns to lead a fuller and more inclusive life in the daylight of ordinary existence
- compresses language and syntax into abrupt dreamlike units to mark the crossing of individual consciousness
- gives voice to the inhabitants of the collective unconscious in the form of a 'whelm of proverbs', muttering of a rudimentary sensibility which is a speech as primitive as folk-saying and almost as subhuman as an animal cry
- attempts to recreate rather than simply report on the journey by using primeval imagery, symbols and rhythms

Words for the Wind (1958)

Selected
Poems

- a representative prize-winning collection of selected verse, including childhood poems, love poems and others

'Meditations of an Old Woman' (1958), 'The Dying Man' (1958)

Affirming
Relations

- the poems illustrate the author's intensified interest in the people around him as he is growing older himself
- turns outward to affirm his relationship with others by adopting their voice and vision at least for a moment
- the former poem features as the narrator an old woman, modelled partly on the author's mother, who considers the imminence of her death, the disappointments of her past but also positive moments, ending with affirmation

The Far Field (1964)

Mixing
Modes

- the collection intermixes the confessional, the metaphysical, the transcendental, the mystical and the visionary
- the title poem traces a literal and transcendental journey of the self through both cultivated and wild landscape

John Berryman (1914–1972)

- his father committed suicide when he was twelve, himself experienced depression and alcoholism, took his life
- started writing short poems of cerebral quality in a direct style, influenced by W. H. Auden (1907–1973) and

Writing Developments

- William Butler Yeats (1865–1939), who saved him from the crushing influence of Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot
- turned to the confessional mode as the formal style of his mentors did not comply with his nervous sensibility
 - preoccupied with portraying dream-like states haunted by **self-tormenting** thoughts and fantasies of suicide

The Dispossessed (1948)

- the collection includes his famous ‘The Ball Poem’ on the symbolic encounter of a little boy with his first loss

Homage to Mistress Bradstreet and Other Poems (1956)

- a long poetic sequence in the dramatic mode, sustained by an eight-line stanza and the persona of Bradstreet
- the Puritan poetess serves as the mistress, across the centuries, of the contemporary poet and as his alter ego
- the author’s voice merges freely into the voice of the protagonist, engages her in dialogue, identifies with her
- his participation in the life of the Puritan woman becomes a means of his imaginative **discovery of America**
- pays homage to the extraordinary woman and her strength which made her the first poet published in America

Early Poetry

Dramatic Poetry

77 Dream Songs (1964); ***His Toy, His Dream, His Rest*** (1968); ***Dream Songs*** (1969)

- the first and the second mentioned contain altogether 385 dream songs, the last volume collects them all in one
- each of the songs is arranged in three six-line stanzas and features as the imaginary central character Henry Pussycat, ‘a white American in early middle age, sometimes in blackface, who has suffered an irreversible loss’
- the protagonist variously talks to himself sometimes in the first person, sometimes in the third, sometimes even in the second, and has a friend who is never named but addresses himself as Mr Bones and variants thereof
- the confessions are turned into a **vaudeville performance** which does not lack relieving moments of humour

Confessional Poetry

Personae

- the poems are peculiarly personal, idiosyncratic, even confusing, but relevant comments on the modern man
- the fragmented syntax of the poems reflects the nervous hesitations and cries of a mentally imbalanced speaker
- the tone oscillates between realism and phantasmagoria, between biting **irony** and **self-pitying** melancholy
- the language varies from archaisms, colloquial speech, street slang and black dialect to word play and puns
- recurrent motifs include the feelings of irreplaceable and incomprehensible loss on the death of loved ones, the pain and suffering as attributes of humanity or confronting crises by the means of psychoanalysis and writing

Features

(17) Projective Verse and Black Mountain School

Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Edward Dorn

Black Mountain School (1950s)

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|------------------|---|
| Place & Persons | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a loose constellation of poets who studied or taught at Black Mountain College (1933–1957) in North Carolina and who saw their guide and fatherfigure in Charles Olson, teacher and rector at Black Mountain (1951–1956) • found outlet for their work in the avant-garde magazines <i>Origin</i> (1951–1985, with breaks), edited notably by Sid Corman (1924–2004), and <i>Black Mountain Review</i> (1954–1957), edited while it lasted by Robert Creeley • included Robert Duncan (1919–1988), Edward Dorn (1929–1999), Jonathan Williams (1929–2008) etc. |
| Ayes & Nays | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rejected the prevailing verse mode of the Academic School and its demands on erudition and formal precision, as represented by Richard Wilbur (b. 1921), William Meredith (1919–2007) or Howard Nemerov (1920–1991) • refused also the mainstream Confessional School and its notion of ‘the private-soul-at-any-public-wall’ poetry • valued the work of Modernist poets, as Ezra Pound (1885–1972) or William Carlos Williams (1883–1963) |
| Aims & Relations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sought a liberation of the poetic ‘I’ from the oppressive rationalism and for adding the projective dimension to the poet’s consciousness, which would revive the sensitivity to internal and external natural and cosmic forces • followed the earlier innovative attempts of Imagism and Vorticism (1910s–1920s) and of Objectivism (1930s) • foreshadowed the Deep Image School (1960s) with its exploration of the irrational aspects of the human mind |

Projective Verse

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Projective, Percussive, Prospective | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • introduced in the first important post-WWII poetry manifesto, Charles Olson’s essay ‘Projective Verse’ (1950) • the essay contrasts the traditional non-projective verse, or closed verse, which is the kind of verse bred by the contemporary press, and the new projective verse, or open verse, which should become the mode of the future |
| Composition by Field | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discards the inherited line, stanza and over-all form and suggests a composition by field instead, bases the composition on the possibilities of breath whose pressures are to be attended as much as the acquisitions of ear • considers the two halves of a poem to be the syllable, born from the head by the way of the ear, and the line, born from the heart by the way of the breath; only the syllable and the line together constitute a projective poem • believes the syllable superior to rime and metre and the line superior to tenses, syntax and grammar generally • recommends the use of various spacing to indicate breath, for instance a line indentation meaning to hold breath |
| Projective Principles | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in terms of the kinetics, it must transfer the same amount of energy from the poet through the poem to the audience, any slackness takes off attention so rhetorical devices and descriptive functions must be used carefully • with respect to the principle of the projective verse, form must never be more than an extension of content • as to the process of composing, one perception must immediately and directly lead to a further perception so that the ideal projective poem becomes more ‘the act of the instant’ than ‘the act of thought about the instant’ |

Charles Olson (1910–1970)

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|----------------|---|
| Dynamic Poetry | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • requires for poetry to be dynamic, ‘art as process’, sought not art as imitation of nature but that art be nature • some of his earliest poems from the 1940s already celebrate the movement of nature in ‘full circle’ and attack the tendency to perceive life and literature in closed terms, since the 1950s his poems further develop this view • his later shorter pieces as well as the ‘Maximus Series’ exercise his sense of poems as performative moral acts |
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| Criticism of Melville | <p><i>Call Me Ishmael</i>⁶⁷ (1947)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a critical work on Herman Melville (1819–1891), which declares ‘SPACE to be the central fact to man born in America’, spelled ‘large because it comes large here’, and starts his concern with spatial rather than linear forms • describes the mythological foundations of the American literary tradition, labelling <i>Moby-Dick</i> as a heroic epic • seeks a ‘usable tradition’ in the American continent rather than to turn to European or Asian cultures, follows the nativism of William Carlos Williams rather than the expatriates like Ezra Pound or T. S. Eliot (1888–1965) |
|-----------------------|--|

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| The Poem as a Flow | <p>‘The Kingfishers’ (1949)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the poem expresses the author’s belief in serial open forms both in the literal sense and by enacting such forms • assumes that nothing can be said exactly and finally, heavily employs repetition, parenthesis and apposition • metamorphoses recurring figures according to the altered conditions in which they are placed, together with them changes also the line in lively responsiveness, denying to see the poem as anything but a continuous flow • discards the worship of ancient Greek and Roman classics to replace them with local Maya and Aztec cultures |
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- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| Poetry Collections | <p><i>In Cold Hell, In Thicket</i> (1953), <i>The Distances</i> (1960), <i>Maximus from Dogtown</i> (1961)</p> |
|--------------------|---|

⁶⁷ The title is the opening sentence of Melville’s *Moby-Dick* (1851). The Biblical Ishmael was a son of Abraham and his maid Hagar.

Individual Poems	<p>‘The Lordly and Isolate Satyrs’ (1956), ‘As the Dead Prey Upon Us’ (1956), ‘Variations Done for Gerald Van de Wiele’ (1956)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> poems outside of the Maximus series, the last mentioned refers to an art student at Black Mountain College
Collected Poems	<p><i>Archaeologist of Morning</i> (1970)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> collected poems, the title reflects the poet’s idea of himself as an ‘archaeologist of morning’ rather than a poet
Maximus Epic Series	<p><i>Maximus Poems</i> (1983)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the author’s own version of the American epic, continues the tradition of extended sequences as Ezra Pound’s <i>The Cantos</i> (1930–1970) and <i>The Pisan Cantos</i> (1948) and William Carlos Williams’s <i>Paterson</i> (1946–1958) features the speaker as an omniscient version of his creator, called for the Neoplatonic philosopher of the name introduces the speaker as an ‘Isolated person in Gloucester, Massachusetts’, which is the author’s home town, and addresses his fellow citizens as an observer, correspondent, social critic, historian, pedagogue and prophet conceives some of the poems as letters, written to himself and to the world and ultimately to all their readers
Knowing the Known	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> aims at a specific reading of the history of the small fishing town of Gloucester to enable a revelation of truth, presents Gloucester as a microcosm of America, makes one particular small town or ‘city’ into the ideal ‘City’ embarks on a journey which is in search of the near, ‘the thing you’re after / may be around the bend’, seeks to avoid the evasions of modern mass culture and to build a new community based on humility, curiosity and care tries to rediscover the familiar, to deal with the ‘facts’ and particulars spontaneously and as if for the first time
Unlearning Bad Habits	<p>‘Maximus, to Himself’ (1953)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the poem states that the speaker has ‘had to learn the simplest things / last. Which made for difficulties’, not that truth was intrinsically difficult but because he had become ‘estranged / from that which was most familiar’ the habits of mind and language that had been entrenched for centuries have to be unlearned, man must turn his consciousness against itself in order to cure the estrangement of the modern society and to make a new start
Newspaper Letters	<p><i>Maximus to Gloucester</i> (1993)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a collection of letters and poems written to the author’s hometown newspapers <i>Gloucester Times</i> in the 1960s aimed to keep the town a ‘living entity’, supporting the preservation of historic buildings or saving wetlands

Robert Creeley (1926–2005)

Writing Influences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> born in Plymouth, New Hampshire, travelled widely but never abandoned the sensibilities of his native culture involved with the free-flowing experiments of Abstract Expressionism, represented for instance by the painter Jackson Pollock, and modern jazz, performed for example by Charlie Parker, Miles Davis or Thelonious Monk interested in life insofar as it lacked intentional control, viewed the artist as someone immersed in the work he creates, experiencing its energy, involved in its movement and limited in expression only by the nature of the art influenced by what he termed a ‘New England temper’, tendency to be hung up, suffer from pain and tension inherited a ‘sense of speech as a laconic, ironic, compressed way of saying something to someone’ and the inclination ‘to say as little as possible as often as possible’, so that the form becomes an extension of the content
Writing Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> fascinated by the way the poem grows out of the active relationship between the perceiver and the perceived seeks a poetry of ‘realisation, a reification⁶⁸ of what is’, ‘a process of discovery’ of both vocabulary and vision eschews generalizations, abstractions and colourful comparisons in favour of patient attentiveness, manifests a willingness to follow the peculiar shape and movement of an experience, no matter how unpredictable it may be produces sparse, brittle poems that use their silences just as effectively as their speech and that present the cardinal sin as cowardice, a reluctance to resist and challenge the several forces that would imprison us in habit his poems evolve on both a sequential grammatical level and a cumulate linear level, each line reaffirms or modifies the sense of the sentence and the total argument, each word exists in contrapuntal tension with others
Writing Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> employs a terse, economic style resembling a sequence of verbal gestures charged with emotional expression his central feeling is pain, but also humour, his stammering phrasing deliberately interferes with his lyricism his talents are lyrical, the majority of his verse explores his personal, emotional and frequently erotic experience writes brief lyric poems, improvised miniatures of everyday life in short free-verse lines and simple language
Individual Poems	<p>‘The Door’ (1959)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a traditional love poem, uses the door as a metaphor of the elusiveness of the ideal woman and the ideal poem <p>‘A Wicker Basket’ (1959)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a poem projecting the altered perceptions of a soft-drug user, one of the first poets to succeed with this theme <p>‘I Know a Man’ (1962)</p>

⁶⁸ ‘Reification’ refers to the conversion of an abstract concept into something concrete, or, to the viewing of the abstract as concrete.

- a poetic miniature of a seemingly trivial drunken conversation of two friends in a car, uses humour and irony

Poetry Collections *A Form of Women* (1959), *For Love: Poems 1950–1960* (1962), *Words* (1967), *Pieces* (1969), *Hello* (1978), *Later* (1979)

Edward Dorn (1929–1999)

- Influences & Modes
- the most radical poet associated with the Black Mountain School, author of indignant swiftian **satirical** poetry
 - studied American Indian culture as an alternative to the fake American democracy and American imperialism
 - influenced by Charles Olson in examining the tension of the intended and the actual language communication
 - wrote in a range of modes, including lyric poetry, meditative verse, poetic parodies and language experiments

Poetry Volumes *From Gloucester Out* (1964), *Idaho Out* (1965), *Geography* (1965)

- the titles of his earliest poetry volumes suggest his coping with the influence and concern with space of Olson

Gunslinger (1968–1975)

- Verse Epic Masterpiece
- an extended mock-heroic epic consisting of four books supplemented by two connective prose commentaries
 - parodies the cult of the masculine hero and other myths of American history, including that of the **Wild West**
 - reminds of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), William Carlos Williams's *Paterson* or Charles Olson's *Maximus Poems*, unlike Olson however views **time as more relevant than space** whose importance he denies
- Journey to Nowhere
- follows the journey of the uprooted protagonist from a specific New Mexico town along the Rio Grande River to increasingly surrealistic and eventually allegorical locations, as the stereotypical small-town of Universe City
 - features as the Gunslinger's company a horse riding in a coach rather than pulling it, a moralizing lady from a western dance saloon, an extravagant scientist named Dr Flamboyant or the hippie drug addict Kool Everything
 - reminds of the works of postmodernist fiction writers, as Kurt Vonnegut (1922–2007) or Thomas Pynchon (b. 1937), in its exploitation of the entropic threat, fluidity of space and time and stock phrases of popular culture

(18) Contemporary African American Poetry

Gwendolyn Brooks, Amiri Baraka, Alice Walker, Michael Harper, Yusef Komunyakaa

African American Poetry

- | | |
|---------|---|
| History | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> historically the oldest of ethnic minority poetries, the first to gain national and even international importance traditionally the most radical of ethnic poetries and the most hostile to white American culture and literature provided by the fact that unlike other ethnic minorities African Americans did not come to America by choice pivotal in contributing to the mainstream culture with the oral folk tradition, the secular and spiritual song the underlying subjects were longing for freedom, struggle for civil rights, criticism of racial discrimination |
| 1960s | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the Black Arts movement was parallel with African American feminism, black women suffered from the double jeopardy of racism and sexism, pioneered taboo themes like sexuality, childbirth, domestic violence etc. the form of African American poetry drew on the preacher style of public speaking, the poet or leader recited at a rapid pace and the audience or chorus danced, shouted and sang in response to the rapt rhythm of the words the content of poetry was radicalised, assertive tone and aggressive gesture served to turn words into weapons |
| Recent | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> recent African American poetry still relies on the spoken word as much as on the written, shifts towards poetry of and for the street which is populist and rejects the conventional distinction between high and popular culture stands at the crossroads between musical and rhetorical forms, overlaps with rapping and hip-hop, exploits ghetto culture in percussive verses and deft rhymes using wry self-mockery, verbal strutting and grim humour includes also such subversive and even offensive forms as gangsta rap, which uses sharp talk and shock tactic to provide a raw testimony to the life of the streets, determined by the basic life necessities of money and sex |

Gwendolyn Brooks (1917–2000)

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| Subjects | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> born in Topeka, Kansas, but considered a native of Chicago, Illinois, where she has lived since early childhood her poetry is occupied with the inhabitants of Bronzeville, a black urban ghetto on the South Side of Chicago considers it her privilege to present African American people not as mere curiosities but rather human beings her early poetry was concentrated rather on simply recording the general human experience of life in poverty since the 1960s her poetry grew more radical, she became a celebrated model for the younger generation poets |
| Forms | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> shows poetic capacity in a variety of emotions, ranging from brutal anger and wry satire to visionary serenity proves to be a brilliant craftswoman at dealing with both the traditional forms and styles and modern free verse her attitude is realistic, described as ‘objective’ and ‘total-real’, excels at compact images and precise language her poetry is a complex amalgam of black folklore, rough street idiom and classical and modern sensibilities |
| Ghetto Dwellers | <p><i>A Street in Bronzeville</i> (1945)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> her first published poetry collection, announced her as an original poetic talent among African American poets chronicles the everyday lives, aspirations and disappointments of ordinary black people in her neighbourhood explores also the unfair treatment of blacks and racism present in the U. S. Army during the Second World War |
| Ghetto Woman | <p><i>Annie Allen</i> (1949)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the collection won her the Pulitzer Prize and made her the first African American poet ever to receive this prize describes the particulars of the troublesome lives of impoverished black slum dwellers, here especially women shows a black woman’s way from childhood to adulthood against the backdrop of poverty and discrimination |
| Social Feeling | <p><i>The Bean Eaters</i> (1960)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> poetry with a strong social feeling, the title poem portrays an old couple at dinner in a messy hired back room <p>‘We Real Cool’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a brief poem which portrays in a direct street slang language the sad and short lives of street gang teenagers |
| Radical Mood | <p><i>In the Mecca</i> (1968)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the collection reflects her shift towards more racial political views in content and a new power in presentation the title poem traces the search of a mother for her daughter lost in the Mecca, a block-long ghetto tenement <p>‘The Second Sermon on the Warpland’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the poem alludes to T. S. Eliot’s <i>Waste Land</i> (1922), contains the famous ‘furious flower’ line which became the motto for the Furious Flower Conference of African American Poets (1994) formally dedicated to the author |
| Later Collections | <p><i>Family Pictures</i> (1970), <i>Beckonings</i> (1975), <i>To Disembark</i> (1981), <i>Children Coming Home</i> (1991)</p> |
| Developments | <p>Imamu Amiri Baraka (b. 1934)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> influenced in the earlier stages of his career by white American poets who saw themselves as alienated from |

Characteristics	<p>the cultural mainstream, some of his poems recall the work of Frank O'Hara, others in turn echo Charles Olson</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • became for a while the most innovative black beat poet, influenced by European Surrealism and Dadaism, the jazz poetry of Vachel Lindsay and Langston Hughes, the jazz music of Charlie Parker and black oral tradition • his early-1960s poetry is formally loose in the bohemian mode of the beat generation, his mid-1960s poetry reflects his concern with the Black Arts, since the 1970s he fights against imperialism as a left-wing adherent • his earliest poetry is determinedly autobiographical, occupied with sex and death, shaped by existential despair • his nationalist poetry is often marked by rage and anger, but employs also cries for help or friendly persuasion • inclines to moral didacticism, but surprisingly manages to extract poetic qualities even from feelings of hatred • expresses respect for the energy of black people, takes pride and places faith in a shared collective identity • seeks to unravel a new language and rhythm to liberate him and the hearts and minds of all his 'black family'
Beatnik	<p><i>Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note</i> (1961)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • his first poetry collection, includes personal and often domestic poems, mostly in the style of the Beat poets
Revolutionary	<p><i>The Dead Lecturer</i> (1964)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • his second poetry collection and his poetic farewell to what he sees as the political decadence of the Beatniks • his lyrics crystallize his commitment to revolutionary action and his increasing concentration on racial issues
Separatist	<p><i>Black Magic: Collected Poetry 1961–1967</i> (1969)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the collection includes numerous separatist poems chronicling his divorce from white culture and white values <p>'Black Art'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an extremist poem which defends a violent revolutionary action against the white American establishment • calls for 'poems that kill', 'assassin poems', claims no love poetry can be written until love may exist freely
Later Collections	<p><i>In Our Terribleness</i> (1970), <i>Hard Facts</i> (1975), <i>Poetry for the Advanced</i> (1979), <i>Wise Why's Y's: The Griot's Tale</i> (1995), <i>Funk Lore: New Poems, 1984–1995</i> (1996)</p>
Present-Day Controversy	<p><i>Somebody Blew Up America and Other Poems</i> (2004)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the title poem aroused much controversy, it was misinterpreted as a defence of the 09/11 terrorist attacks and accused of anti-Semitic sentiments, as it suggests that the Israeli were responsible for the Twin Towers attacks

Alice Walker (b. 1944)

Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • her creative vision is rooted in the economic hardship, racial terror and folk wisdom of her native Georgia • explores multidimensional kinships among women, among men and women or among humans and animals • her work embraces and illustrates the redemptive power of social, spiritual, cultural and political revolution • writes in a spare and lyric free verse compared to Zen Buddhist poetry or to the work of Gwendolyn Brooks • avoids artificial artfulness, her short and simple lines are warm addresses invoking solidarity and compassion
Life & Death	<p><i>Once</i> (1968)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • her first poetry collection, based on her experiences during the civil rights movement and her travels to Africa • influenced in form by the Japanese haiku and in content by the existentialist philosophy of Albert Camus • contains meditations on love and suicide, contemplates death but also the triumphant decision to reclaim life • influenced presumably by her unwanted pregnancy when at college and her anguished deciding for abortion
Revolution & Love	<p><i>Revolutionary Petunias and Other Poems</i> (1973)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • her second collection, the narrative poems revisit her southern past and challenge superficial political military • focuses on revolutionaries and lovers and on how the loss of trust and compassion robs human beings of hope
Tributes to Blacks	<p><i>Good Night, Willie Lee, I'll See You in the Morning</i> (1979)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the poems of her third collection contain tributes to black political leaders as well as fellow creative writers • the title of the collection is explained by the author as the last words of her mother to her father at his funeral • searches for connections between love relationships and lasting change, presents love not as disease but health
Humans & Nature	<p><i>Horses Make a Landscape Look More Beautiful</i> (1984)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the poems of the collection capture the ordinary joys of life, as a daughter's homecoming or a lover's warmth • addresses also the issues of racism and injustice and insists on the need to save our planet from self-destruction
Society & Ecology	<p><i>Absolute Trust in the Goodness of the Earth: New Poems</i> (2003)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the collection continues to examine the author's long-time interest in spiritual questions and ecological topics • praises friendship, romantic love, ancestors, ethnic diversity, peace movements and admirable strong women
Poetry Sketches	<p><i>A Poem Travelled Down My Arm</i> (2005)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the collection was inspired by the author's task of providing autographs for the copies of her previous

collection, decided to make each signature a thoughtful reflection, an impromptu sketch and a heartfelt poem
 • the result is a collection of insights and drawings, by turns charming and humorous, provocative and profound
Hard Times Require Furious Dancing: New Poems (to be released in 2010)

Coming
Soon

Michael Harper (b. 1938)

Character-
istics

- studied medicine, employs medical terminology and medical metaphors, especially in his *Debridement* (1973)
- inspired by the black **musical tradition**, imitates not only the forms but also the specific visions of jazz music
- admired musicians Billie Holiday, Bessie Smith, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk, John Coltrane
- presents the deprivations felt in African American history in such a manner as to disturb the white conscience
- records violence as a matter of family loss and racial history, as the death of an infant son or of a brother, the suffering inflicted on Native Americans by Puritans or the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X
- seeks to unite the fractured inhumane technologies of our time with the abiding well of black folk traditions

Jazz &
Blues

Dear John, Dear Coltrane (1970)

- intended as a homage to John Coltrane and his mentors, saxophonist Charlie Parker and trumpeter Miles Davis
- explores his connection to jazz saxophonist and tenor John Coltrane and claims human and cultural **continuity**
- perceives jazz and blues as characteristically open-ended forms whose most important feature is their modality
- believes that moments of improvisation can assist the artist in revealing deeper meanings of human experience
- suggests his peculiar wholistic vision of the universe, views the past as inextricably connected with the present
- addresses the theme of redemption in compact poems based on historical events and figures and personal life

Past &
Present

‘Here Where Coltrane Is’

- the poem tries to identify with the message and impression of John Coltrane’s record *A Love Supreme*⁶⁹ (1964)
- exploits jazz not merely as a specific music form but also as an expression of the way one perceives the world

History Is Your Own Heartbeat (1971)

- explores the African American past, merges the **personal and historical** experience indiscriminately into one
- supplants the false Western myths by ‘new arrangements of human essentials confirmed by past experience’

Song: I Want a Witness (1972)

- continues to stress the significance of history to the individual human beings, particularly African Americans

Vietnam
Veterans

Debridement (1973)

- the title is a medical term referring to the surgical removal of dead or contaminated tissue from a wound, in this case a metaphor for the wound of the Vietnam War which cannot be healed due to the problems of veterans
- devotes one part of the volume to a black soldier who was wounded in Vietnam and now suffers from severe depressions, fails to re-assimilate into society and ends his life absurdly when attempting to rob a grocery store

Tributes
to Blacks

Nightmare Begins Responsibility (1975)

- sets the general tone of the collection by including many poems referring to various African American writers
- one of his most acclaimed collections, offers a series of portraits of individual courage despite circumstances

Later
Poetry

Images of Kin: New and Selected Poems (1977), ***Healing Song for the Inner Ear*** (1985), ***Honourable Amendments*** (1995)

Present
Day

Songlines in Michaeltree: New and Collected Poems (2000)

- his most recent collection, eschews neither the personal, political nor the lyrical, but chooses a middle road from the multiple intersections of memory and experience, music and language, oppression and achievement
- uses repetition and lyric fragmentation reflecting the influence of jazz but also of blues, gospel and folk music

Yusef Komunyakaa (b. 1947)

Formal
Features

- a poet, editor and essayist, the most appreciated of African American poets, winner of the Pulitzer Prize (1994)
- influenced by experimental European literature, by Harlem Renaissance poets and by jazz and blues rhythms
- writes in a confessional mode informed by strikingly original images, **dense language** and syntactic tension
- speaks in a universal voice, whether it embodies the specific experience of a black man, a soldier or a child

Writing
Subjects

- draws on in his childhood spent in the racially segregated Bogalusa, Louisiana, on his difficult relationship with his father who disapproved of his son’s wish to study and on his Vietnam experience as a correspondent
- shows **what it is to be human** in dealing with complex moral issues and harrowing subjects of American life
- seeks in his writing to ‘remove layers of façades and superficialities’ to ‘get down to the guts of the things’

⁶⁹ The title song includes a ‘musical narration’ or a ‘wordless recitation’ of a devotional poem quoted in the liner notes, meaning Coltrane plays the words on his saxophone without pronouncing them. The device pays homage to the sermons of black preachers.

Music
Catharsis***Copacetic***⁷⁰ (1984)

- a collection of poems built from colloquial speech which demonstrates his incorporation of **jazz** influences
- explores jazz as a medium to express racial iniquity and as a catharsis to heal the wounds of hatred and bigotry
- describes childhood memories and folk experiences that are startling and pleasurable, gripping and appealing
- invokes jazz and blues forms, themes and idioms to create poetry aiming to soothe the pain of his community
- renders the hope of a people who have persevered and ultimately triumphed despite the long history of racism

Against
Labels***I Apologize for the Eyes in My Head*** (1986)

- the collection attempts to coalesce seemingly disparate events, to extract meaning from all lived experiences
- satirically analyses narrow and simplifying definitions, rejects the idea of status or class and 'Uncle Tom-ism'
- embraces ordinary images of old women, babies, prostitutes or ghosts and attributes them a mythic resonance

Vietnam
Poetry***Dien Cai Dau***⁷¹ (1988)

- the collection deals with the Vietnam War and is considered perhaps the best American poetry on the subject

Veteran
Racism**'Facing It'**

- the poem describes the contradictory feelings of an African American veteran on visiting the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D. C., and reading the names of victims engraved in the black granite of the memorial
- the speaker is ignored by a white veteran but ends up captivated by the image of a passing woman and her son
- mingles darkness and light, reality and fiction, contrasts the names of casualties and the uninvolved passers-by

Soldier
Racism**'Tu Do Street'**

- the poem interweaves the themes of racism and the Vietnam conflict, shows racism in the American army

Boyhood
Memories***Magic City*** (1992)

- the collection is a tense and lyrical evocation of the author's boyhood, brilliantly captures the imagination of a child, drawing on images as a love-torn and abusive father, rivalry of siblings or a neighbourhood street prophet

'My Father's Love Letters'

- the poem portrays an abusive father dictating to his literate son love letters for his wife who abandoned him

Pulitzer
Prize***Neon Vernacular*** (1993)

- a collage of new and collected poems from the previously published volumes, winner of the Pulitzer Prize

'Songs for My Father'

- a powerful series of poems tracing the development of the relationship of the poet to his father, beginning with mutual incomprehension and disappointment and ending in a delayed reconciliation with the dying old father

Classical
& Modern***Talking Dirty to the Gods*** (2000)

- a mixture of classical and modern themes where Greek mythology and deadly sins meet sensuality and jazz

Present
Day

Pleasure Dome: New & Collected Poems, 1975–1999 (2001), ***Taboo: The Wishbone Trilogy, Part 1*** (2004), ***Warhorses*** (2008)

⁷⁰ The word was originally coined by the African American tap dancer Bill 'Bojangles' Robinson to refer to situations where everything is all right. The expression was later adopted by jazz musicians to describe particularly melodious and smooth pieces.

⁷¹ The title is Vietnamese for 'this crazy head', a phrase which the Vietnamese used for the American soldiers fighting in Vietnam.

(19) Postmodernist Experiment

John Barth, Robert Coover, Thomas Pynchon,
William Gass, William Gaddis, Ishmael Reed, Vladimir Nabokov

Postmodernism

Characteristics

- a general term referring to the various cultural changes, developments and tendencies since the 1940s or 1950s
- incorporates whatever follows after the exhaustion of Modernism, may be viewed even as a reaction against it
- postmodernist literature tends to be experimental, non-traditional, oriented against authority and signification
- includes experiments with form and content, for instance concrete poetry, theatre of the absurd, transformation plays, magic realism in fiction, new modes in science fiction, the popularity of neo-Gothic and the horror story
- exploits eclectic approach, aleatory writing, fragmentation, allusiveness, travesty, **parody**, **pastiche**, **collage**
- employs irony, self-mockery, immersion in popular culture, refusal of grand ideas, fluidity of time and space

Related Concepts

- related to the literary and philosophical theories of **post-structuralism** and **deconstruction** as described by Jacques Derrida, an approach deconstructing the old and defunct and building up something new out of the ruins
- challenges, rewrites and deconstructs ancient mythology, fairy tales, religious concepts, historical facts etc.
- refuses grand narratives and deep meanings, prefers assuming masks and presenting but images and surfaces
- aspects of postmodernism are discussed in **Jean-François Lyotard**'s *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984) or **Frederic Jameson**'s *Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) etc.
- the blurring borders between high and low culture are dealt with in **Susan Sontag**'s 'Notes on "Camp"' in *Against Interpretation* (1966), describing 'camp' in terms of artifice, frivolity, naïve pretentiousness and excess

John Barth (b. 1930)

Writing in Voices

- employs language to set up distance between reader and character, the narrator and character, text and world
- presents energetic and comically ebullient voices speaking with sometimes playful and sometimes angry irony
- creates worlds within worlds, uses parody and pastiche, verbal and generic play to produce multiple simulacra
- his texts and characters constantly comment on themselves and subvert any temptation to link fiction to reality

World as Language

- his self-reflexive fiction presented in a self-referential language qualifies both as **metafiction** and postmodern
- we construct our world from the inside out by using language, we cannot get out of the prison of our language
- our world is the sum of our constructions of it and any apparent essence or meaning is really a social construct
- insists that life equals language equals story, which means that to abandon the language is to surrender to death

Suicide Memoir

***The Floating Opera* (1956)**

- his first novel, an autobiographical discussion of suicide, shows his skills but is still rather traditional in form

Multiple Identities

***The End of the Road* (1958)**

- the novel presents a man so aware of the **plural possibilities** of existence that he ends up incapable of reacting
- he is haunted by a sense of the absence of any identity outside of roles and meaning apart from performance
- the protagonist is advised to attempt to remedy his condition by becoming a college teacher to 'teach the rules'
- he becomes involved with the wife of a fellow teacher who believes life can be contained within one version
- the novel finishes with his leaving the college and taking a cab to the airport, giving the instruction 'terminal'

History Pastiche

***The Sot-Weed Factor* (1960)**

- the novel takes its protagonist from the author of the eponymous poem about whom virtually nothing is known
- the protagonist is involved in a lusty picaresque tale, a pastiche of history, historical fiction and autobiography

Fiction within Fiction

***Giles Goat-Boy* (1966)**

- the novel begins with fictive letters of introduction by several editors who dismiss it as unhealthy and dubious
- the letters liberate the author from the authority of authorship and advise the reader to read the book as fiction
- the fiction is a series of self-referential sings whose value lies in the intrinsic language interplay between them

Stories &
Novellas

- conceives the whole modern world as a university campus, controlled by a computer which tyrannizes people
- parodies the genres of myth, allegory or the quest, also parodies a variety of literary texts, including the Bible
- translates the **earth into an artifice**, suggests that the world is a fictional structure created but by our language

***Lost in the Funhouse* (1968)**

- a short story collection featuring the ultimate postmodern protagonist who 'becomes no more than her voice'

***Chimera* (1972)**

- a collection of three loosely connected novellas, one of them using the figure of the storyteller Scheherazade

Epistolary
Novel
Later
Novels

***Letters* (1979)**

- the novel reveals several narratives through correspondence by characters from the author's fiction and himself

***Sabbatical: A Romance* (1982), *The Tidewater Tales* (1987), *The Last Voyage of Somebody the Sailor* (1991)**

Forms &
Subjects

Robert Coover (b. 1932)

- his writing is characteristic for its improvisation and violation of formal principles and bourgeois decorums
- favours the **pastiche** approach, heavily draws on shared **popular culture**, especially films and film characters
- his earliest work is an exercise in creating, fracturing, mythologising, ironising, entertaining and confounding
- his later writing addresses important **public issues** without comprising its commitment to excess and revelry
- exploits satire and the tendency of language to self-parody, but also conveys essential insights about humans
- enjoys the freedom of inventing his own reality, but also responds to the claims of a reality not of his making

Novel on
Sectarians

***The Origin of the Brunists* (1966)**

- his first novel, revolves around the sole survivor of a mine disaster who founds a numerological religious sect

Game
Over Life

***The Universal Baseball Association, Inc., J. Henry Waugh, Prop.* (1968)**

- turns to the game of baseball to explore the journeys of Americans in and out of the literal and the imaginary
- the game progressively devours every person and relationship entangled in the intricate weave of this novel
- presents as the protagonist an unhappy accountant who spends nights immersed in his invented baseball league in which every action is ruled by the dice and whose life crumbles as his favourite player dies on the table-top

Fantasy
Stories

***Pricksongs and Descants* (1969)**

- a collection of short fiction, a fiendishly clever exercise of unfettered imagination and compulsive stylisation

History
as Fiction

***The Public Burning* (1977)**

- intermixes the grotesque and the pathetic, the outrageous and the sober, the plausible and the impossible etc.
- his finest novel, transfers actual events from the period of the presidency of Eisenhower to the figurative realm
- turns the actual execution of the Rosenbergs⁷² into a fictional public burning held in Times Square, New York
- presents Times Square as a source of history, for it is here that the records of the *New York Times* are created
- analyses how historical record is made and suggests that both **fiction and fact** aid in the rehearsal of the past
- draws the past into subjective reality and offers a postmodernist meditation on history and the origins of story

Erotic
Perversion

***Spanking the Maid* (1982)**

- the novel tells the story of a master and his maid who are bound by the obsessive ritual suggested by the title

Detective
Romance

***Gerald's Party* (1986)**

- the novel is a takeoff on detective stories and a complex romance built around dreams, false leads and memory
- encompasses one night at a party given by the title character, who records its progress with painstaking detail

Cinema
Stories

***A Night at the Movies, or, You Must Remember This* (1987)**

- a collection of short fiction on topics related to the cinema, including the story 'Charlie in the House of Rue'

⁷² Ethel and Julius Rosenberg were a Jewish American couple accused of espionage on the atomic bomb for the interest of the USSR, found guilty by the jury and both electrocuted in 1953. The question of their guilt or innocence remains today a subject of dispute.

Forms &
Subjects**Thomas Pynchon (b. 1937)**Seminal
Short Story

- the most acclaimed and personally the most elusive of the postmodernists, very little is known about his person
- shows a world on the edge of **apocalypse**, threatened by a vast **conspiracy** directed by or against a power elite
- replicates the world as text, as an extraordinarily intricate system of signs that must but cannot be interpreted

Inside v.
Outside**‘Entropy’⁷³ (1960)**

- his first major short story, formative for his later fiction, uses entropy as a figure for civilization running down
- follows carefully the claim by Henry Adams⁷⁴, ‘Chaos was the law of nature; Order was the dream of man.’
- presents a deliberately schematic situation and two equally schematic central characters of **opposing qualities**
- Meatball Mulligan occupies a downstairs flat where he is holding an outrageous party moving towards chaos
- Callisto⁷⁵ occupies an upstairs flat and is trying to warm a frozen bird back to life in his small hothouse jungle
- Mulligan’s party moves through chaos to consequent torpor, and he does what he can to stop the deterioration
- Callisto’s bird dies, and his girlfriend smashes the window of the hothouse to break the shell of his fantasy life
- the story mediates between binary opposites, which are also the opposites of modern consciousness and culture
- Meatball is the pragmatist, active to the point of excess, working inside the chaos in attempts to mitigate it
- Callisto is the theorist, passive to the point of paralysis, constructing patterns for the chaos trying to explain it
- the story illustrates the alternatives of hyperactivity and containment, the open and the closed, present and past
- his later work similarly shows the formative principles of immersion and separation, the flexible and the fixed

Drifting v.
SeekingMeaning
& Identity**V (1963)**

- his first novel, presents the modern world as an entropic wasteland inhabited by people devoted to annihilation
- employs characters who are ciphers, seeing others and themselves not as people but as things, objects, masks
- contrasts Benny Profane, a loser type who drifts through life in such enterprises as hunting alligators in sewers, and Hubert Stencil, son of a former spy on search for the mysterious female spy and anarchist known only as V.
- V. stands by turns for Venus, Virgin and Void, an absent presence who seems to be everywhere and nowhere

Conspiracy
Mystery

- Profane stands for the deconstructive, one who floats, while Stencil stands for the constructive, one who seeks
- Profane lives in a world without signs or discernible patterns, Stencil in a world of elusive signs and apparent patterns, for his father left behind enigmatic clues pointing to a vast conspiracy in modern history and to lady V.
- Stencil’s quest is for a fulcrum identity of his own and for the identity of modern times, he moves through events of the twentieth century seeking to recover the master plot, the meanings of modern history and this book
- the only meaning which Stencil finds is the **erasure of meaning**, the emptying of a significant human history
- Profane and Stencil are eventually linked together by their failure of significance and their failure of identity

WWII
Maze***The Crying of Lot 49* (1966)**

- the novel follows Oedipa Maas, whose onetime lover, Pierce Inverarity, makes her an executor of his estate, which leads to the discovery of a conspirational underground communications system from the sixteenth century
- Oedipa hopes to solve the enigma through a mysterious bidder keen to buy Inverarity’s stamp collection, but the novel ends with the enigma unsolved and Oedipa awaiting the crying out at the auction of the relevant lot 49

***Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973)**

- the novel is set during the Second World War, the author was not a witness to the war but an inspired fantasist
- involves a Nazi Lieutenant and an American Lieutenant, both in disguise, and V-2 rockets raining on London
- presents individuals as creatures simply reduced to nonentities by large organizations and technological forces
- uses technology and stereotypes of spy fiction to flatten his characters, to render them absurd and ineffectual
- contains cartoonish elements, dizzying multiplication of bizarre plots, oddball characters, pop-culture myths
- describes the V-2 rocket in similar terms as V., compelling and mysterious, beautiful and dangerous, compares the V-2 rocket to a rainbow arched downwards as if by a force of gravity that is dragging humankind to its death
- the rocket initiates a need to find meaning but it offers an **excess of meaning**, an excess which is an evacuation

Surveying
BoundariesWorld’s
Apocalypse1960s
Detective***Mason and Dixon* (1997)**

- the novel moves back to the years of the early republic when men as the two surveyors mentioned in the title⁷⁶

⁷³ Entropy is a measure of the natural decay within a social system; the amount of entropy gives the amount of **disorder in a system**.

⁷⁴ Henry Adams (1838–1918), author of autobiography *The Education of Henry Adams* (1907), was a historian and intellectual, the grandson of President John Quincy Adams (in office 1825–1829) and the great grandson of President John Adams (1797–1801).

⁷⁵ In Greek mythology, Callisto was one of the nymphs of Artemis, who transformed Callisto into a bear and set her among the stars.

⁷⁶ Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon surveyed what is now the Mason-Dixon Line, a demarcation line forming parts of the borders among Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland and West Virginia, a resolution of the border dispute among the colonies in the 1760s.

were trying to establish boundaries in the boundlessness of America in order **to appropriate** it for themselves

Aesthetic
Views

***Against the Day* (2006)**

- the novel sprawls over more than a thousand pages and features over a hundred of characters all over the world
- portrays a world of unrestrained corporate greed, false religiosity, moronic fecklessness and evil in high places

***Inherent Vice* (2009)**

- the novel is set during the 1960s and follows the bizarre experiences of a marijuana-smoking private detective

William H(oward) Gass (b. 1924)

Multiple
Viewpoints

- a philosophy professor, literary critic, fiction writer, an unapologetic spokesman for the consolations of form
- insists on the autonomy and purity of art while struggling to avoid the pale formalism of empty aestheticism
- regards the sound as well as meaning of words, characteristic for audacious and flamboyant **verbal opulence**
- seeks to create characters unlike ourselves but also resembling us enough to make readers interested in them
- prefers the internal to the external but also sees that there is no inside without outside, no self without others
- makes his fictional landscape a metaphor for an actual physical environment rather than its straight depiction
- manages to evoke in the language of his fiction much that language is helpless to alter or register adequately

Multiple
Rhetoric

Mixed
Media

***Omensetter's Luck* (1966)**

- his first novel, follows a man who settles with his family in a small town in Ohio in the late nineteenth century
- the protagonist's actions lead to supernatural occurrences, such as weather changes, and his good fortune and purity are tainted when he is unjustly connected to a mysterious death of his landlord, frustrated by his powers
- the novel pieces together various viewpoints without using the quotation marks to distinguish the speakers

Colour
Blue

Tunnelling
in and out

***In the Heart of the Heart of the Country* (1968)**

- a collection of five short stories or novellas, each of them evoking the usual small-town life in the **Midwest**
- experiments with a variety of rhetorical styles in the extravagant languages of the otherwise naïve narrators

***Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife* (1970)**

- a lively novella about a stripteaser's recollections of her life and activities, also a commentary on art in general
- a wilfully outrageous mixed-media piece, highly digressive, full of **typographical** and other visual devices

Forms &
Subjects

***On Being Blue* (1976)**

- a fanciful meditation on the significance of the colour blue, indebted to Gertrude Stein's theories of language

Satire
on Arts

***The Tunnel* (1995)**

- an enormous novel which took nearly thirty years to complete and first appeared in fragments in periodicals
- refuses linear narrative continuity, features a historian's attempt to write an introduction to his masterpiece on *Guilt and Innocence in Hitler's Germany* and his producing a deeply personal writing on his own history instead
- tunnels figuratively through his mind and literally in his basement, from where he starts digging a tunnel out

William Gaddis (1922–1998)

Satire on
Business

- travelled extensively in Europe and Central America, which provided him with knowledge of various settings
- exploits the possibilities of the **satirical** mode, assesses contemporary society in both harsh and humorous way
- characteristic for his disconnected unpunctuated dialogues, minimal plot lines and all-pervasive black humour

***The Recognitions* (1955)**

Satire on
Society

- his first novel, an elaborate experimental satirical work crowded with highly outlandish and sinister characters
- the settings range from the nineteenth-century New England to Central America and contemporary New York
- the protagonist is a Yankee artist whose original talent is overwhelmed by his career as a copyist of old masters
- incorporates a range of cultural references, literary allusions, references to pop culture, parodies of other works
- gives a bizarre and disturbing image of contemporary society, in particular the shallow New York intelligentsia

Satire
on Law

***JR* (1975)**

- his second novel, published after a twenty-year-long creative break, eventually won the National Book Award
- the eponymous protagonist is an ambitious boy who amasses a corporate empire by using telephones and mails
- satirizes public education and business practises, exposes the corruption and hypocrisy of the business world

***Carpenter's Gothic* (1985)**

Activities

- formally a more accessible novel, explores the helplessness engendered by dependent love and family disorder
- offers a bleak vision of America that has been eroded by reactionary fundamentalism and materialistic greed

& Writing

***A Frolic of His Own* (1994)**

- a bulky novel centring on the complexities and bafflements of the law, including much technical legal detail
- a National Book Award winner, satirically assesses the American legal system and the fashion for litigation
- the protagonist is a community-college teacher who sees himself as 'the last civilized man' and who tries to hotwire his own car, gets run over and injured in the attempt and spends much time figuring out whom to sue

Views on Culture(s)

Ishmael Reed (b. 1938)

Dead & Living

Hoodoo Novel

- became involved in the formation of the Black Arts Movement, but never identified with the Black Aesthetics
- helped found the *East Village Other* as one of the first influential alternative newspapers based in New York
- made it his aim to live between cultures and as a poet and fiction writer dramatize the exchanges between them
- does not shrink from controversy or from going against the grain of any prevailing critical or creative fashion
- his writings mix elements of satire, surrealism, science fiction and pop art with political and racial commentary
- sees human history as a cycle of battles between the oppressed and the oppressors and undertakes to revise it
- uses tradition to illuminate and reinvigorate it, combines continuity and spontaneity in the dynamic of culture
- takes up the theme of the return to the past and revolt against the presents to give it a new multicultural twist
- advocates his Voodoo Aesthetic⁷⁷, a mutually reflective uncoercive mixture of cultural forms rooted in plurality
- replaces monoculturalism with its presumptions to a monopoly on the truth by the idea of **multiculturalism**

Slave Tale Pastiche

***The Free-Lance Pallbearers* (1967)**

- his first major novel, a subversive departure from the autobiographical style of earlier African American works
- the title suggests the author's abiding interest in the connection between then and now, the dead and the living

***Mumbo Jumbo* (1972)**

Later Novels

- the novel dismisses any traditional kind of African American narrative that limits experience to a single model
- metamorphoses the writer into the **voodoo-man**, weaving backwards and forwards in time and narrative levels
- confronts proponents of rationalism and militarism with those who are believers in the magical and intuitive
- mingles historical, social and political events with fictional inventions, draws freely on conspiracy theories, the attempts by whites to suppress jazz music, also includes for instance Harlem Renaissance authors as characters

Back-ground

***Flight to Canada* (1976)**

- the novel picks up the slave narrative form and transforms a remembrance of servitude into an act of liberation
- uses parody, deliberate anachronism, irreverent humour and constant crossing between histories and cultures
- surprises with shrewd mixings and sudden splicings, as of the Civil War with the civil rights wars of the 1960s
- follows the protagonist of a **runaway slave** of the pre-Civil War era who escapes to freedom via bus and plane
- refuses to be slave to his narrative, presents a world following no other rules but diversity, chance and change
- suggest that freedom springs from confluence, from an easygoing commerce taking place between cultures

Early Novels

***The Terrible Twos* (1982), *The Terrible Threes* (1989), *Japanese by Spring* (1993)**

Decon-struction

Vladimir Nabokov (1899–1977)

- born into a wealthy and prominent family in Russia, his father opposed the tyranny of the tsar and then of the bolsheviks and took his family into exile, where he was murdered by a reactionary fellow countryman in Berlin
- lived in Berlin and Paris between the wars, produces his first successful poems, stories and novels in Russian
- emigrated to the United States (1940) to escape the onset of totalitarianism, started teaching Russian literature
- explains his own aesthetic of **subjective idealism** as writing for the sake of pleasure, not for a moral purpose

Subjective Reality

***The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (1941)**

- his first novel in English, about a man who discovers the nature of his half-brother while writing his biography

***Bend Sinister* (1947)**

- a novel about a politically uncommitted professor in a totalitarian state who tries to maintain personal integrity

Poem Novel

***Lolita* (1955 in Paris, 1958 in New York)**

- a novel about the passion of a middle-aged European émigré for the twelve-year-old girl, or 'nymphet', Lolita
- uses traditional **romance patterns** to deconstruct them, the elements of quest, attainment, journey, loss, pursuit and revenge in the narrator's desiring, possessing and fleeing with Lolita, losing her and killing her new lover
- creates a style both outrageously lyrical and outrageously jokey, constantly teasing and eluding his audience
- produces a **lexical playfield**, a verbal game, a magical maze created of a slippery story and protean characters

Parody

⁷⁷ Distinguishes between Voodoo, the traditional black folk religion, and **Hoodoo**, rather a set of folk magic or conjure practises with predominantly black roots but also various different influences. The most important aspect of Hoodoo is ecstatic music and dance.

of Form

- the narrator commits child abuse and statutory rape but above all acts like a moral totalitarian with his victim, imprisons her within his own reality and denies her the right to a reality of her own, however vulgar or ordinary
- concludes with a brief moment of the pain of knowing, realizing that his guilt lies especially in his having robbed the girl of her childhood, stealing from her the chance to assert right from the start her life and her reality

Pale Fire (1962)

- a postmodernists tour de force purporting to be a poem about an exiled Balkan king in a New England college town and the involved critical commentary on the poem by an academic who admits to being the king himself

Ada, or Ardor: A Family Chronicle (1969)

- a parody of the family chronicle form, a difficult novel which is a medley of Russian, French and English
- intimates the lifelong affair of a brother and sister who discover this relation too late to overcome their feelings