

American Literary Modernism

Tomáš Pospíšil

Francisco Goya – Nude Maja (1800)



Henri Matisse – The Blue Nude (1907)



Marcel Duchamp – Nude Descending the Staircase No 2 (1912)



The House of the Four "Mamlas" vs. Loos House



A Crisis in Representation

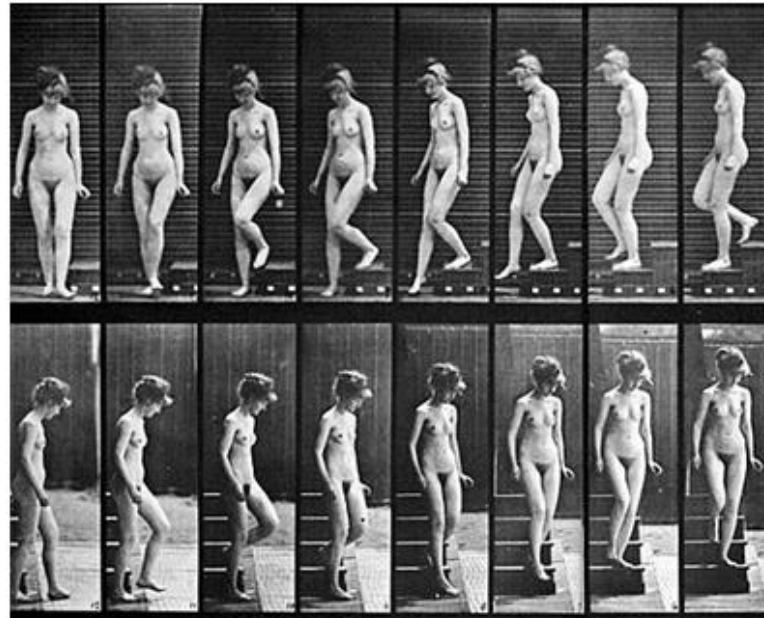
- Around 1910 a certain space was shattered. It was the space of common sense, of knowledge, of social practice, of political power, a space hitherto enshrined in everyday discourse, just as in abstract thought, as the environment of and channel for communication.... Euclidean and perspectivist space have disappeared as systems of reference, along with other former 'common places' such as town, history, paternity, the tonal system of music, traditional morality, and so forth. This was a truly crucial moment. (Lefebvre, qtd. In Harvey, 1974)

A Crisis in Representation

- • How was it possible, using the narrative structures of realism to write anything other than a parochialist and hence to some degree 'unrealistic' novel in the face of all this spacial simultaneity? Realist narrative structures assumed, after all, that a story could be told as if it was unfolding coherently, event after event, in time. Such structures were inconsistent with a reality in which two events in different spaces occurring at the same time could so intersect as to change how the world worked. (Harvey)

Edwaerd Muybridge – Locomotion Studies

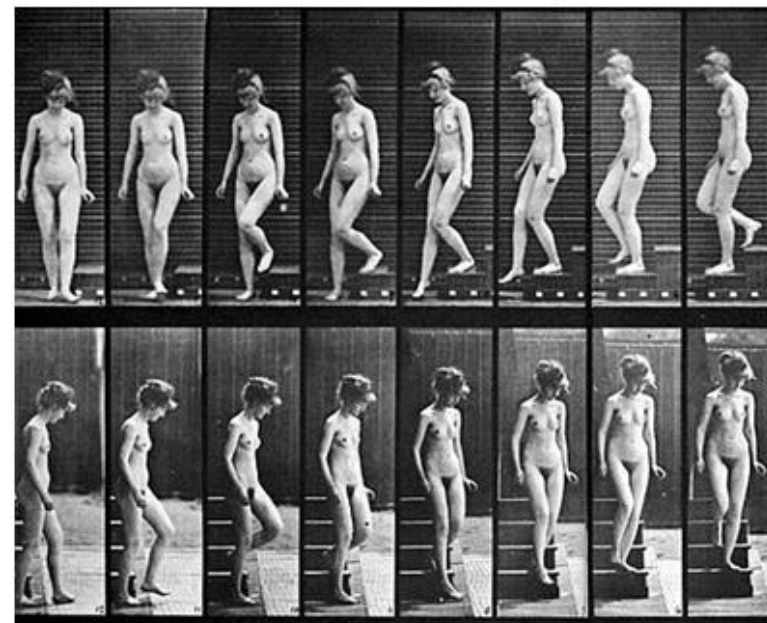
Edwaerd Muybridge – Human
Locomotion Studies, 1880s



Two Nudes Descending the Staircase



Edwaerd Muybridge – Human Locomotion Studies, 1880s



Relativity of Space and Time



- •The thrust of the age (1880-1918) was to affirm the reality of private time against that of a single public time and to define its nature as heterogeneous, fluid and reversible. (Kern 34)
- •
- •"The soft watches are an unconscious symbol of the relativity of space and time, a Surrealist meditation on the collapse of our notions of a fixed cosmic order". (Ades)

“The Stigmata” according to Commager

- •1) the rejection of reason, meaning, normality, morality, continuity, and coherence, the rejection of civilization itself as eccentric and decadent.
- •2) a passionate interest in the subconscious and the unconscious [...]
- •3) an obsession with sex, especially in its abnormal manifestations [...]
- •4) a weakness for the primitive [...]
- •5) repudiation of all orthodox moral standards

The Crisis of Western Civilization

From Ezra Pound - *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920, 1921)

- V.
- There died a myriad,
And of the best, among them,
For an old bitch gone in the teeth,
For a botched civilization,
- Charm, smiling at the good mouth,
Quick eyes gone under earth's lid,
- For two gross of broken statues,
For a few thousand battered books.

Armory Show - 1913



- When the Armory show opened in New York in 1913, it caused one of the biggest sensations the art world had ever known. An exhibition conceived by artists, it drew unprecedented crowds—about 87,000 at its debut in New York, 188,700 in Chicago, and 14,400 in Boston—publicizing modernism in a big way. (Begley)

Gino Severini "Dynamic Hieroglyphic of the Bal Tabarin" (1912)



The Harlem Renaissance

– The **Harlem Renaissance** was a cultural movement that spanned the 1920s. At the time, it was known as the "**New Negro Movement**", named after the 1925 anthology by Alain Locke.

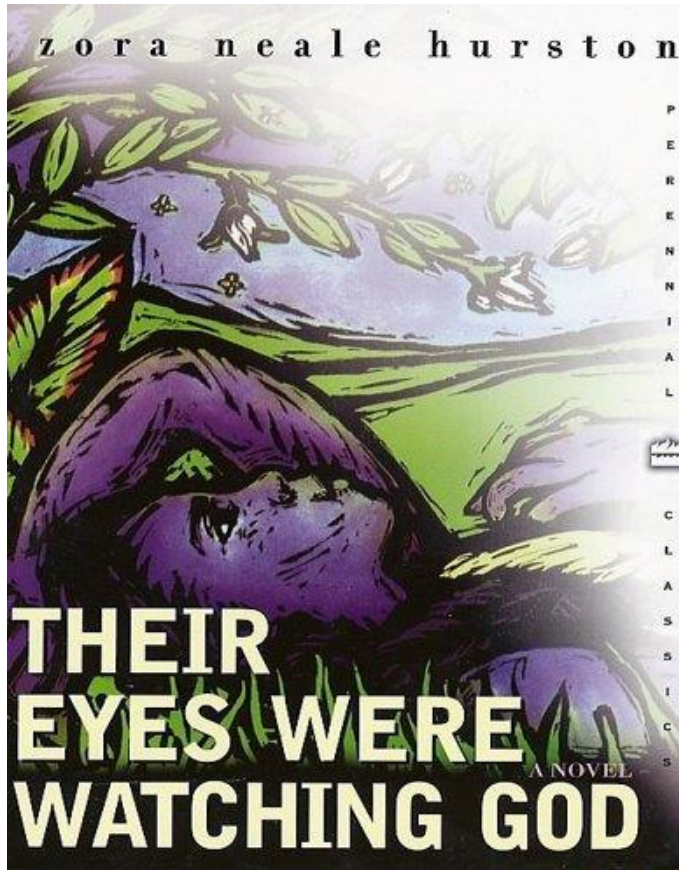


Zora Neale Hurston (1891 – 1960)

- **Zora Neale Hurston** (1891 – 1960) was an American folklorist, anthropologist, and author.
- Wrote four novels and more than 50 published short stories, plays, and essays
- Best known for her 1937 novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.



Their Eyes Were Watching God



- Ships at a distance have every man's wish on board. For some they come in with the tide. For others they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by Time. That is the life of men.
- Now, women forget all those things they don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly.

Imagism: H. D and Ezra Pound



Imagism - Principles

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

H. D. - The Pool

Are you alive?

I touch you.

You quiver like a sea-fish.

I cover you with my net.

What are you—banded one?

T.S. Eliot (1888 – 1965)

- An essayist, publisher, playwright, literary and social critic and "one of the twentieth century's major poets."
- Born in St. Louis, Missouri in the United States, he moved to the United Kingdom in 1914
- In 1927 was naturalized as British subject
- Nobel Prize 1948

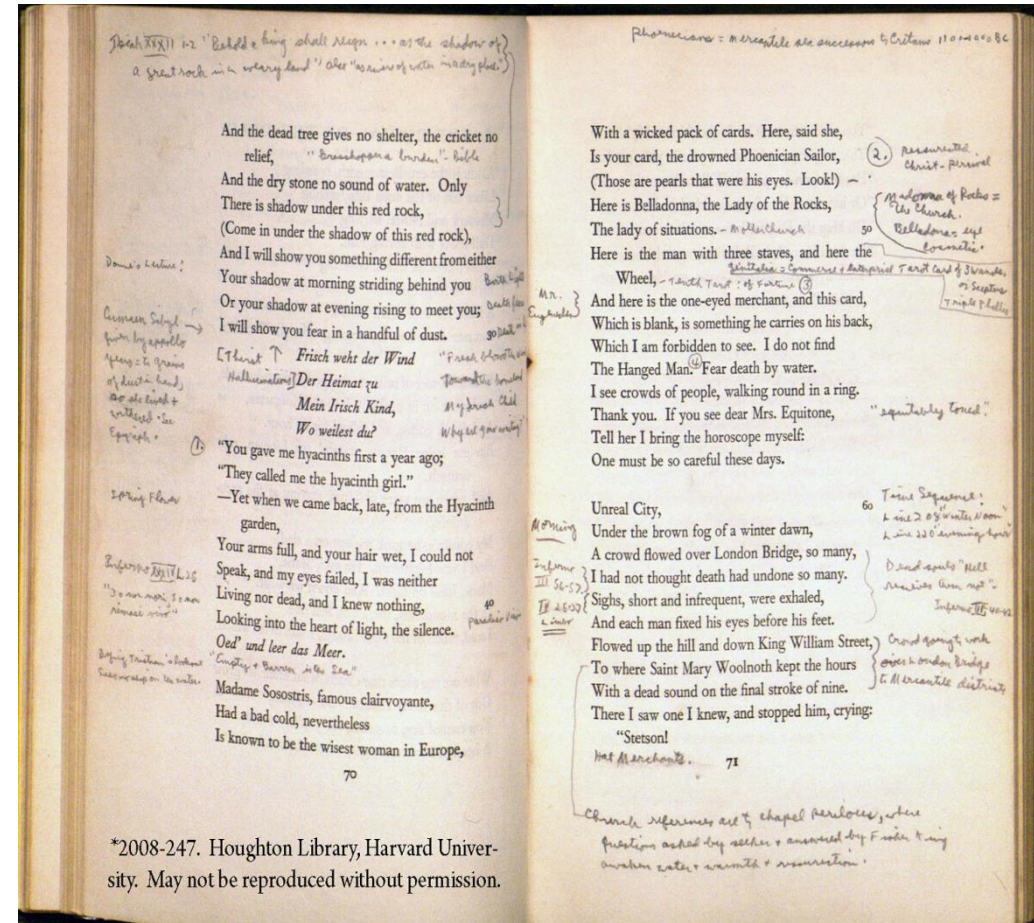


The Waste Land

From *The Waste Land*

What is that sound high in the air
Murmur of maternal lamentation
Who are those hooded hordes swarming
Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth

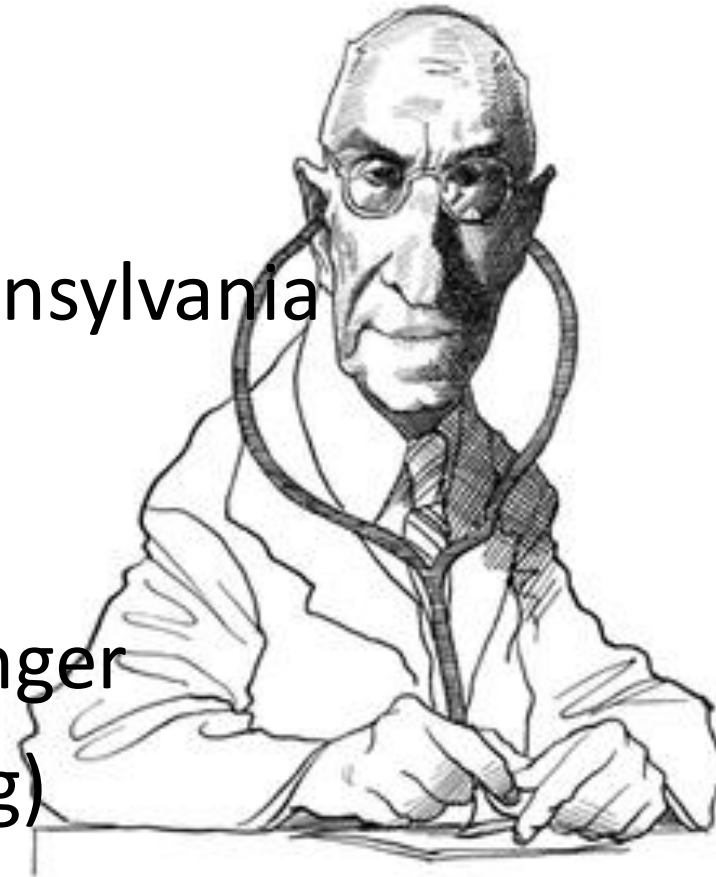
Ringed by the flat horizon only
What is the city over the mountains
Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air
Falling towers
Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
Vienna London
Unreal



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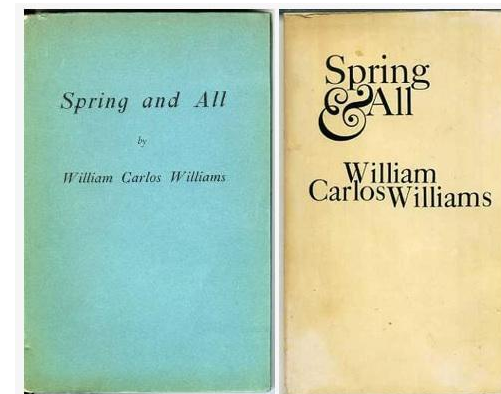
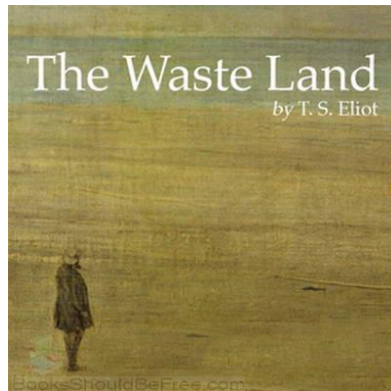
W. C. Williams

- Born, lived and died in Rutherford, New Jersey
- Studied medicine at the University of Pennsylvania
- Led a decent life of a family doctor
- Later mentor of younger poets (Allen Ginsberg)



Williams' Vein of US Modernism

- During his university studies he became friends with Ezra Pound -> for a short time involved in the Imagist movement
- Later criticised works of Pound and T. S. Eliot, objecting to their allusions to foreign languages and attachment to European culture
- *The Waste Land* (1922) x Williams's *Spring and All* (1923)



- Alfred Stieglitz's Spring Showers, 1902



W. C. Williams' Young Sycamore

- I must tell you
this young tree
whose round and firm trunk
between the wet

pavement and the gutter
(where water
is trickling) rises
bodily

into the air with
one undulant
thrust half its height-
and then

- dividing and waning
sending out
young branches on
all sides-

hung with cocoons
it thins
till nothing is left of it
but two

eccentric knotted
twigs
bending forward
hornlike at the top

An Analysis

- The poem takes its place as another artifact, an object in the world, but also refers to a series of parallel motions: Nature produces the tree, in a fashion very close to the way we have seen the production of inventions described; Williams produces his poem; and the reader is invited to join in the creative process, not by looking through the language to that which it describes, but by paying attention to the poem itself, and, if the paradigm of the poet and nature holds, producing some object of his own.
- Even without knowing Williams's theories about poetry, by turning mind and attention to the poem-as-object, the reader is referred to Williams's process of creation in language. Although the poem describes an act of detailed perception, and thus at first recalls Williams's statement that artists teach us to see, a closer examination of "Young Sycamore" shows that it places equal emphasis on speaking and language. (Steinman)

Wallace Stevens (1879 – 1955)

- born in Reading, Pennsylvania, educated at Harvard and then New York Law School.
- He spent most of his life working as an executive for an insurance company in Hartford, Connecticut.
- He won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry for his *Collected Poems* in 1955.



Anecdote of a Jar (1932)

- I placed a jar in Tennessee,
And round it was, upon a hill.
It made the slovenly wilderness
Surround that hill.
- The wilderness rose up to it,
And sprawled around, no longer wild.
The jar was round upon the ground
And tall and of a port in air.
- It took dominion every where.
The jar was gray and bare.
It did not give of bird or bush,
Like nothing else in Tennessee.

The “Lost Generation”

– Who?

- F. Scott Fitzgerald
- Sherwood Anderson
- Ezra Pound
- Gertrude Stein
- Sylvia Beach
- James Joyce
- John Dos Passos

– Painters:

- Miro
- Picasso

- Gertrude Stein’s term
- LG defined a sense of moral loss or aimlessness
- -> many young men lost their hope => they become “lost”
- Well-known term due to its publication in the novel *The Sun Also Rises* by Hemingway



Gertrude Stein



Sylvia Beach



Ezra Pound



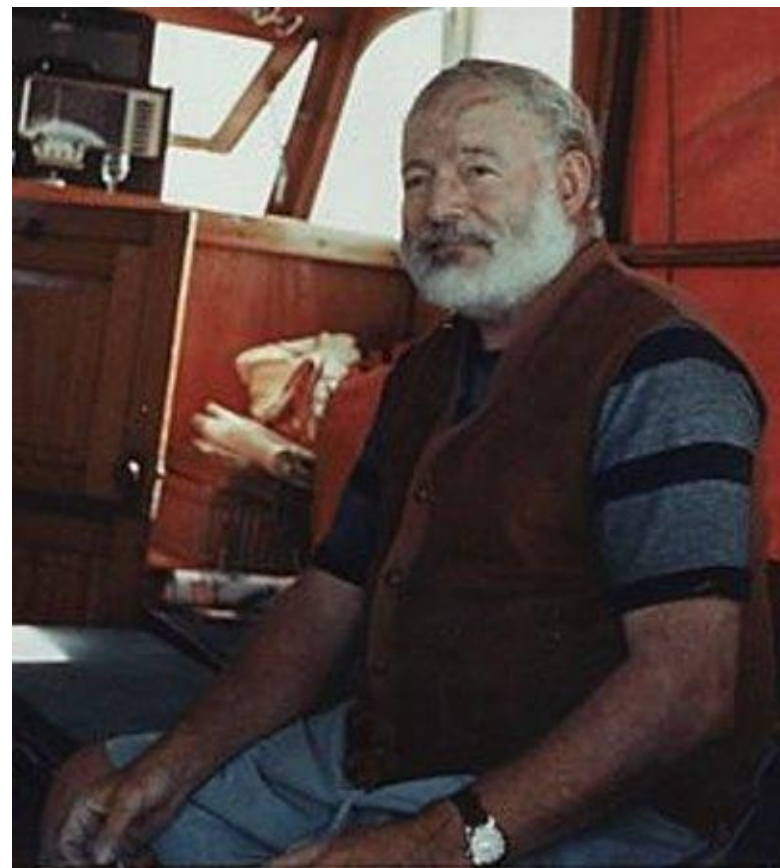
F.Scott Fitzgerald

Why Lost Generation?

- uprooted, by experience torn away from any tradition
- the schools and education had prepared it for another world than what existed after the war, because the war did not prepare them for anything other than travel and thrills.
- it had lost attachment to any region, because it tried to live in permanent exile.
- it rejected all older values, but also illusions, hopes for a bright future, real feelings certainties [...] expectations and explanations.
- They also lost God. (Ulmanová, Roraback)

Ernest Hemingway

- Ernest Miller Hemingway
- American novelist, short-story writer, journalist, (dramatist)
- Regarded as a hero, celebrity, star of the world of literature
- Major literary influence, Nobel Prize for literature



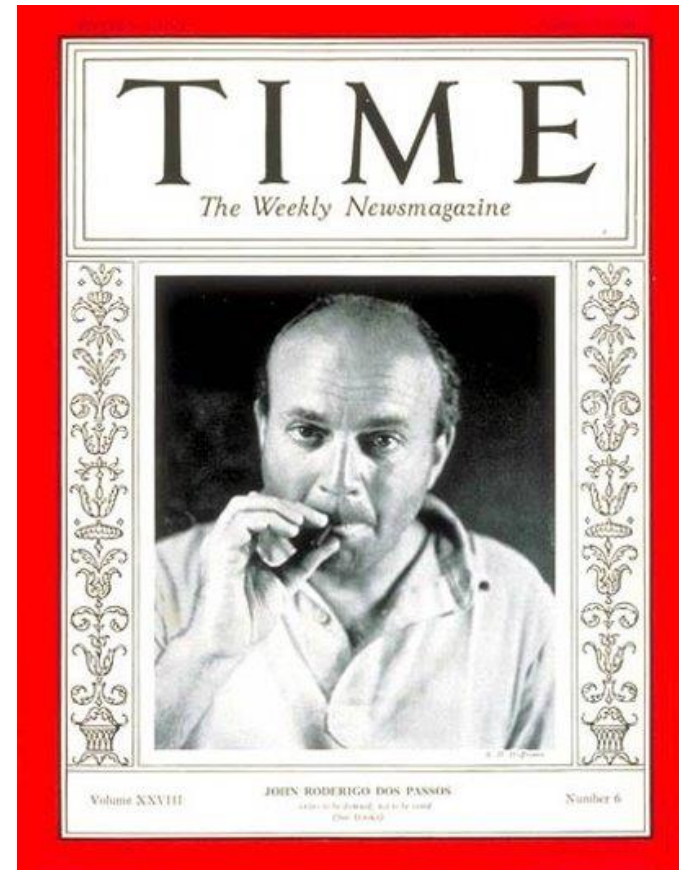
Hemingway's most successful period

- 1926 – ***The Sun Also Rises*** his first famous novel was published and made a celebrity of him, written in stripped-down “Hemingway style”
- 1927 – ***Men without Women*** a collection of short stories
- 1929 – ***A Farewell to Arms***

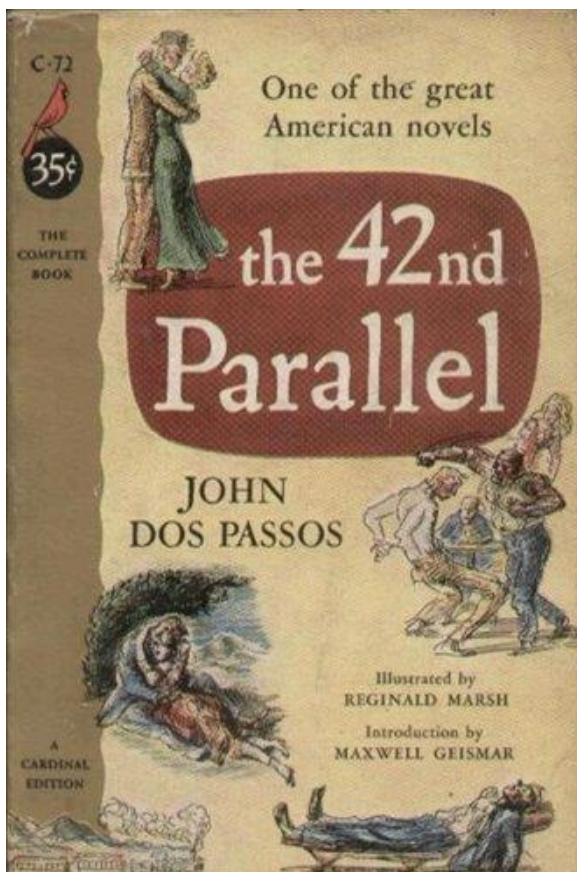


John Dos Passos (1896-1970)

- studied at Harvard
- studied art and architecture in Spain
- worked as a voluntary ambulance driver in Italy and France
- during his life his political views changed from communism to conservatism



The 42nd Parallel (The USA Trilogy, Part 1)



- **Four Narrative Modes**
- Newsreel (collections of headlines, news briefs and song lyrics)
- The Camera Eye (autobiographical stream-of-consciousness passages)
- Traditional realist passages (headed with the names of the protagonists)
- Biographies (Edison, Morgan, Ford, Debbs, Valentino, Taylor, Veblen)

Newsreel

BODY TIED IN BAG IS FOUND FLOATING

*Chinatown my Chinatown where the lights are low
Hearts that know no other land
Drifting to and fro*

APOPLEXY BRINGS END WHILE WIFE READS TO HIM

Mrs. Harding was reading to him in low soothing voice. It had been hoped that he would go to sleep under that influence.

DAUGHERTY IN CHARGE

*All alone
By the telephone
Waiting for a ring*

Two Women's Bodies in Slayer's Baggage

RACE IN TAXI TO PREVENT SUICIDE ENDS IN FAILURE AT THE BELMONT

Newsreel

- BUGS DRIVE OUT BIOLOGIST
 - Elopers bind and gag; is released by dog
- EMPEROR NICHOLAS II FACING REVOLT OF EMPIRE GRANTS SUBJECTS LIBERTY
 - paralysis stops surgeon's knife by the stroke of a pen
 - the last absolute monarchy of Europe passes into history
- miner in Death Valley and freak advertiser od Santa Fe Road may die sent to bridewell for stealing plaster angel
 - *On the banks of the Wabash far away*

Camera Eye

- sirens bloom in the fog over the harbor horns of all colors everyshaped whistles reach up
from the river and the churn of screws the throb of engines bells
- the steady broken swish of waves cut by prows out of the unseen stirring fumblingly
through the window ten-
 - tacles stretch tingling
 - to release the spring
- tonight start out ship somewhere join up sign on the dotted line enlist become one of
 - hock the old raincoat of incertitude (in which you
- hunch alone from the upsidedown image on the retina painstakingly out of color shape words
remembered light
 - and dark straining...

The Southern Literary Renaissance

- In the 1920s and 1930s, a renaissance in Southern literature
- William Faulkner, Katherine Anne Porter, Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers
- Allen Tate, Thomas Wolfe, Robert Penn Warren, and Tennessee Williams, etc.
- During the 1920s, Southern poetry thrived under the Vanderbilt "Fugitives".



Some distinctive features...

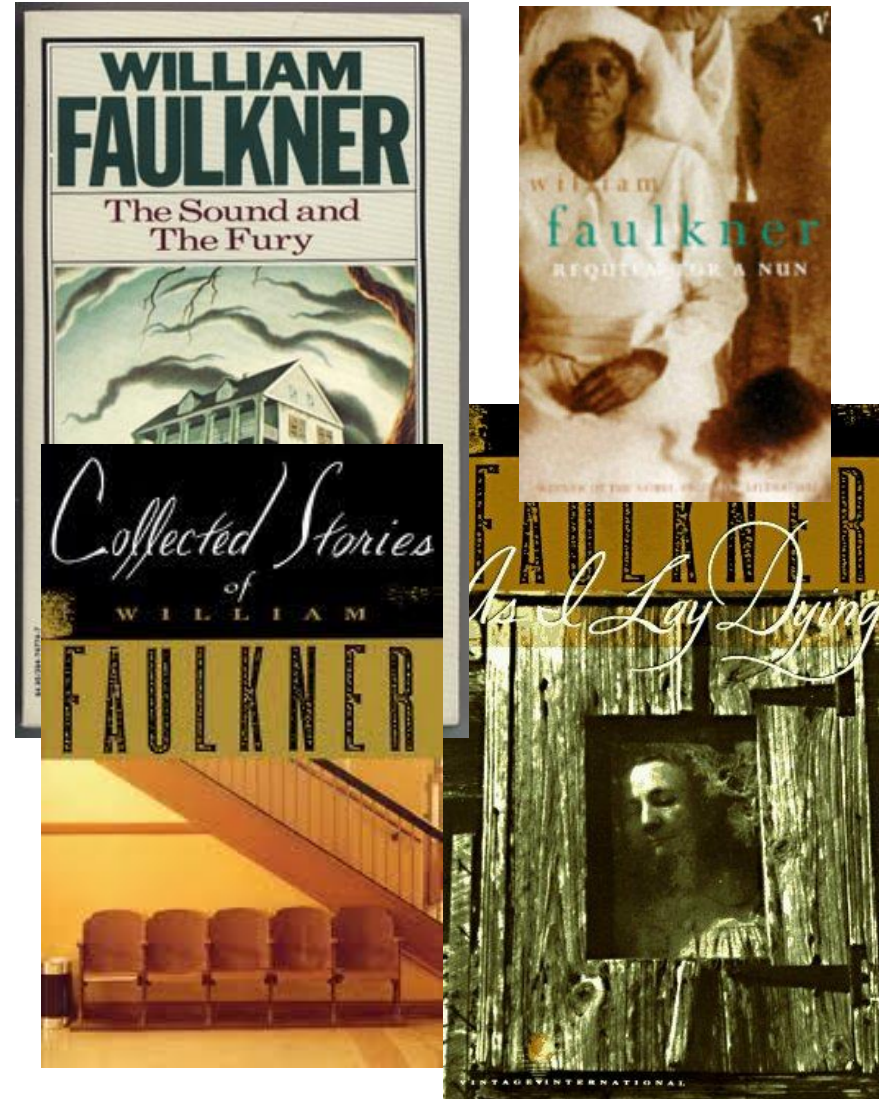
- 1) a strong historical consciousness
- 2) an agricultural tradition
- 3) the existence of of an oral story-telling tradition
- 4) the question of race; tense relationships between the blacks and the whites
- 5) ubiquitous presence of black and southern dialects
- 6) the question of class; its interplay with race
- 7) strange concepts of God and responsibility to family, home and region
- 8) an all-penetrating sense of the grotesque

William Faulkner 1897 - 1962

- Born in Mississippi
- Focus on: Southern history, significance of family, sense of justice and issues of racial tension
- Narrative complexity, stylistic virtuosity
- Nobel Prize 1949



- 19 novels
- 125 short stories
- 1 play
- A number of essays, screenplays and poems
- Most popular novels: *As I lay dying* (1930) and *The Sound and the Fury* (1929)
- Favorite setting: Yoknapatawpha County, on Lafayette County



Barn Burning (1939)

- The store in which the justice of the Peace's court was sitting smelled of cheese. The boy, crouched on his nail keg at the back of the crowded room, knew he smelled cheese, and more: from where he sat he could see the ranked shelves close-packed with the solid, squat, dynamic shapes of tin cans whose labels his stomach read, not from the lettering which meant nothing to his mind but from the scarlet devils and the silver curve of fish - this, the cheese which he knew he smelled and the hermetic meat which his intestines believed he smelled coming in intermittent gusts momentary and brief between the other constant one, the smell and sense just a little of fear because mostly of despair and grief, the old fierce pull of blood. He could not see the table where the Justice sat and before which his father and his father's enemy (our enemy he thought in that despair; ourn! mine and hisn both! He's my father!) stood, but he could hear them, the two of them that is, because his father had said no word yet...(Faulkner).