

# 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)



# A Crisis in Representation

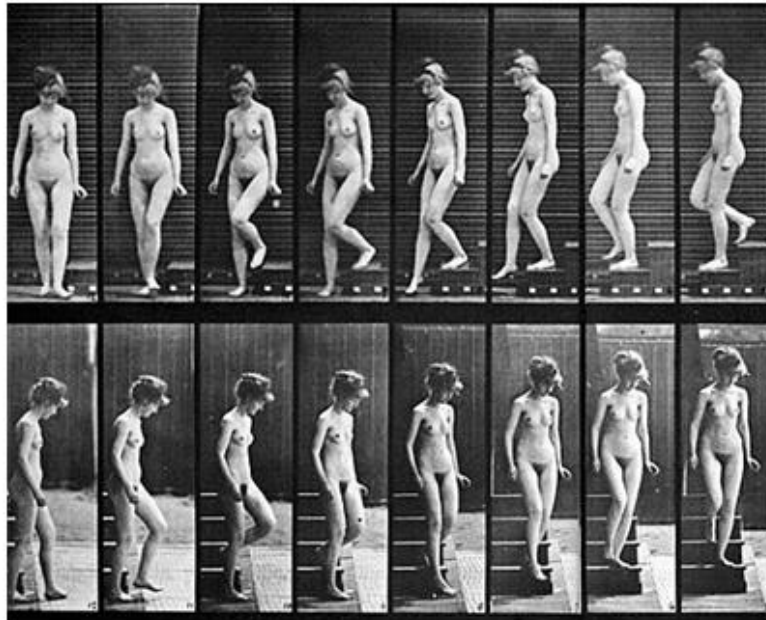
- Around 1910 a certain space was shattered. It was the space of common sense, of knowledge, of social practice, of political power, a space hitherto enshrined in everyday discourse, just as in abstract thought, as the environment of and channel for communication.... Euclidean and perspectivist space 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



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



# “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

# 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)

# 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

# Separation on the River Kiang

Ko-Jin goes west from Ko-kaku-ro,  
The smoke-flowers are blurred over the river.  
His lone sail blots the far sky.  
And now I see only the river,  
The long Kiang, reaching heaven.

From *Cathay* (1915)

# 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?

## Pound – from *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.



# T.S. Eliot (1888 – 1965)

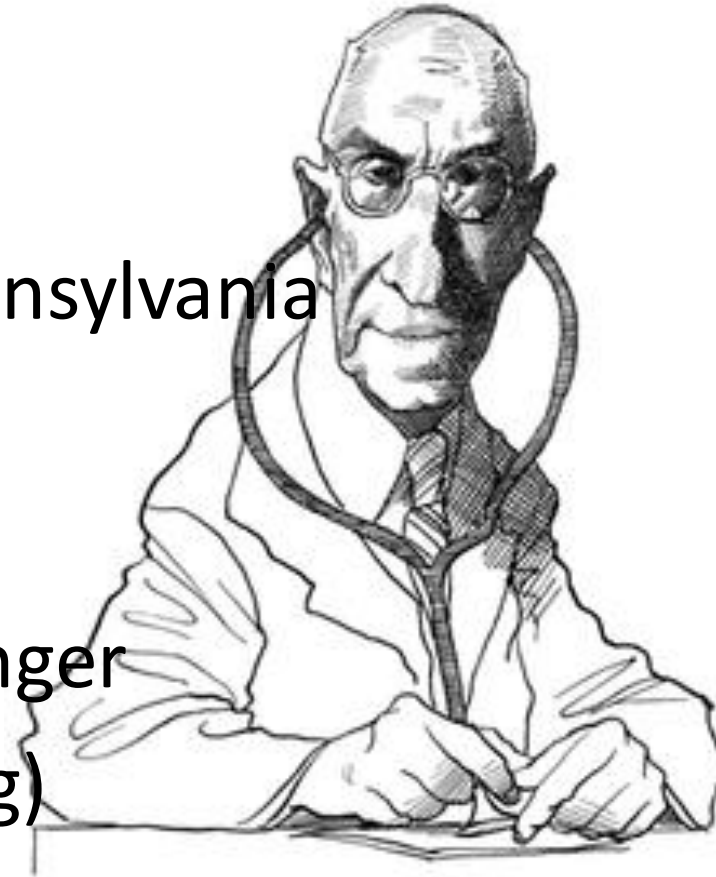
- An essayist, publisher, playwright, literary and social critic and "one of the twentieth century's major poets."
- Born in St. Louis, Missouri in the United States, he moved to the United Kingdom in 1914
- In 1927 was naturalized as British subject
- Nobel Prize 1948





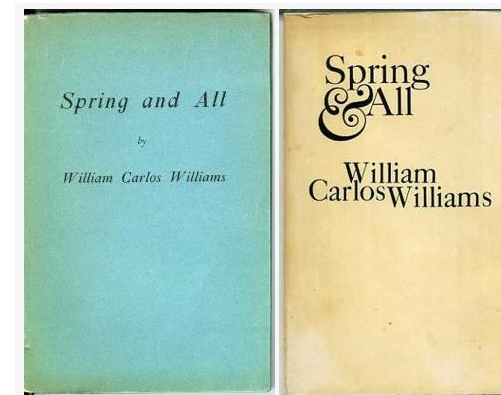
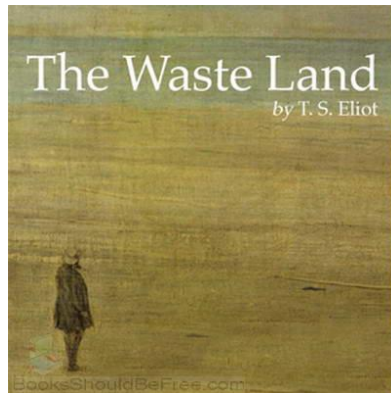
# W. C. Williams

- 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.

# An Analysis

- The jar, then, essentially infects nature, taming or domesticating
- its wilderness....
- While Keats’s jar seems to almost take on a life of its own, the behavior of Stevens’s jar seems wholly dependent on the *perspective of the human who is there to see it.*
- [Thus it may represent] **a meditation on the human instinct for narrative and meaning—the desire to create an “anecdote,” to make sense of the world through stories and art.**
- <https://www.litcharts.com/poetry/wallace-stevens/anecdote-of-the-jar>

# 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



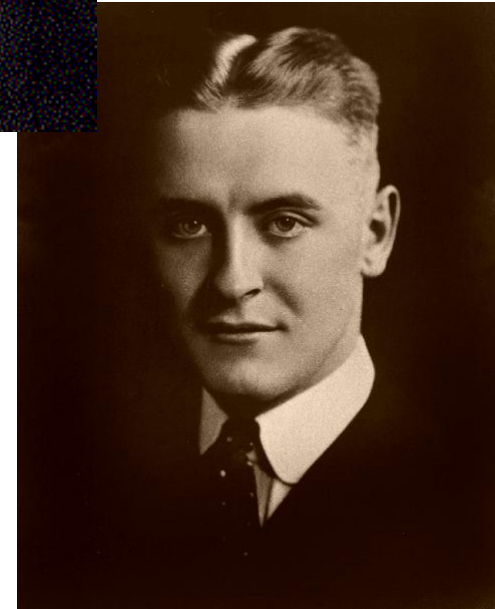
Gertrude Stein



Sylvia Beach



Ezra Pound



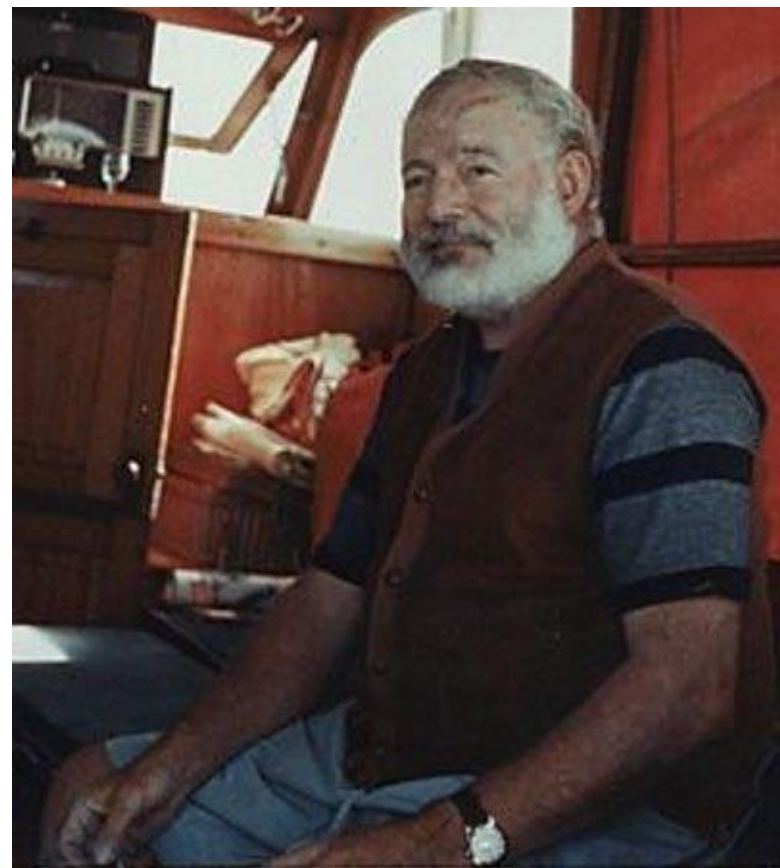
F.Scott Fitzgerald

# 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*



# From “Cat in the Rain”

- ‘Did you get the cat?’ he asked, putting the book down.
- ‘It was gone.’
- ‘Wonder where it went to,’ he said, resting his eyes from reading.
- She sat down on the bed.
- ‘I wanted it so much,’ she said. ‘I don’t know why I wanted it so much. I wanted that poor kitty. It isn’t any fun to be a poor kitty out in the rain.’
- George was reading again.
- She went over and sat in front of the mirror of the dressing table looking at herself with the hand glass. She studied her profile, first one side and then the other. Then she studied the back of her head and her neck.
- ‘Don’t you think it would be a good idea if I let my hair grow out?’ she asked, looking at her profile again.



# From “Cat in the Rain”

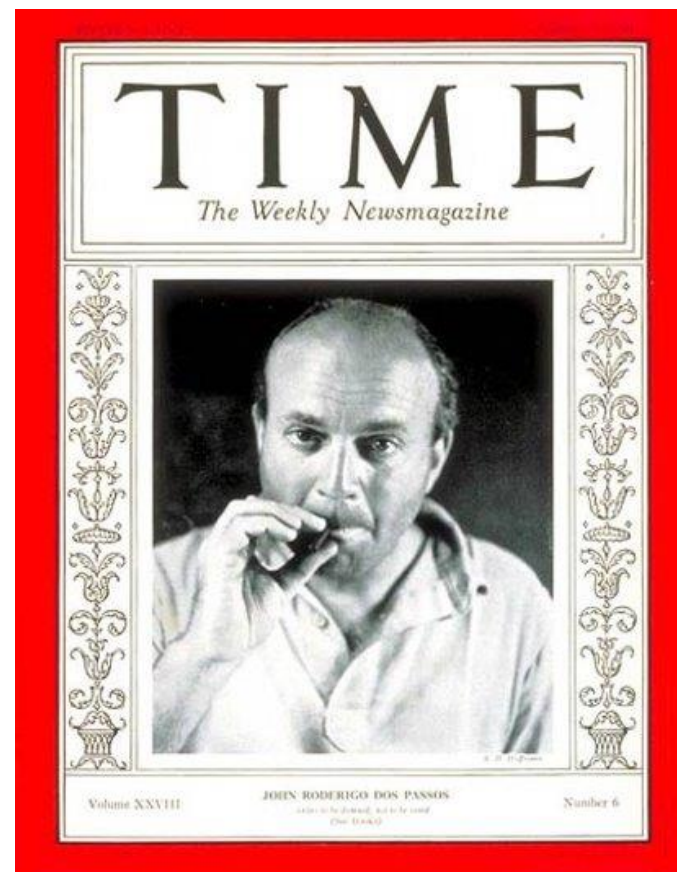
- George looked up and saw the back of her neck, clipped close like a boy’s.
- ‘I like it the way it is.’
- ‘I get so tired of it,’ she said. ‘I get so tired of looking like a boy.’
- George shifted his position in the bed. He hadn’t looked away from her since she started to speak.
- ‘You look pretty darn nice,’ he said.
- She laid the mirror down on the dresser and went over to the window and looked out. It was getting dark.
- ‘I want to pull my hair back tight and smooth and make a big knot at the back that I can feel,’ she said. ‘I want to have a kitty to sit on my lap and purr when I stroke her.’
- ‘Yeah?’ George said from the bed.
- ‘And I want to eat at a table with my own silver and I want candles. And I want it to be spring and I want to brush my hair out in front of a mirror and I want a kitty and I want some new clothes.’

# From “Cat in the Rain”

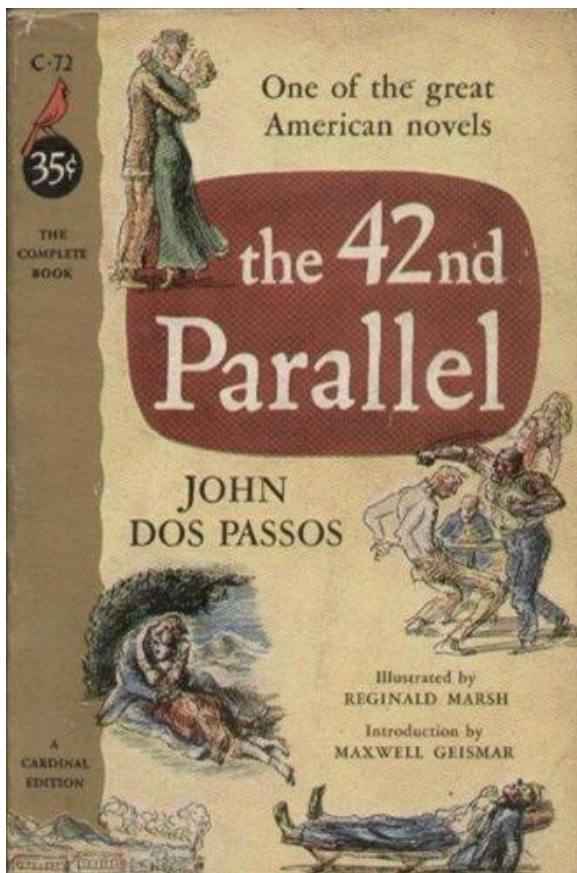
- ‘Oh, shut up and get something to read,’ George said. He was reading again.
- His wife was looking out of the window. It was quite dark now and still raining in the palm trees.
- ‘Anyway, I want a cat,’ she said, ‘I want a cat. I want a cat now. If I can’t have long hair or any fun, I can have a cat.’
- George was not listening. He was reading his book. His wife looked out of the window where the light had come on in the square.
- Someone knocked at the door.
- ‘Avanti,’ George said. He looked up from his book.
- In the doorway stood the maid. She held a big tortoiseshell cat pressed tight against her and swung down against her body.
- ‘Excuse me,’ she said, ‘the padrone asked me to bring this for the Signora.’

# 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 Renaissance

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





# Some distinctive features...

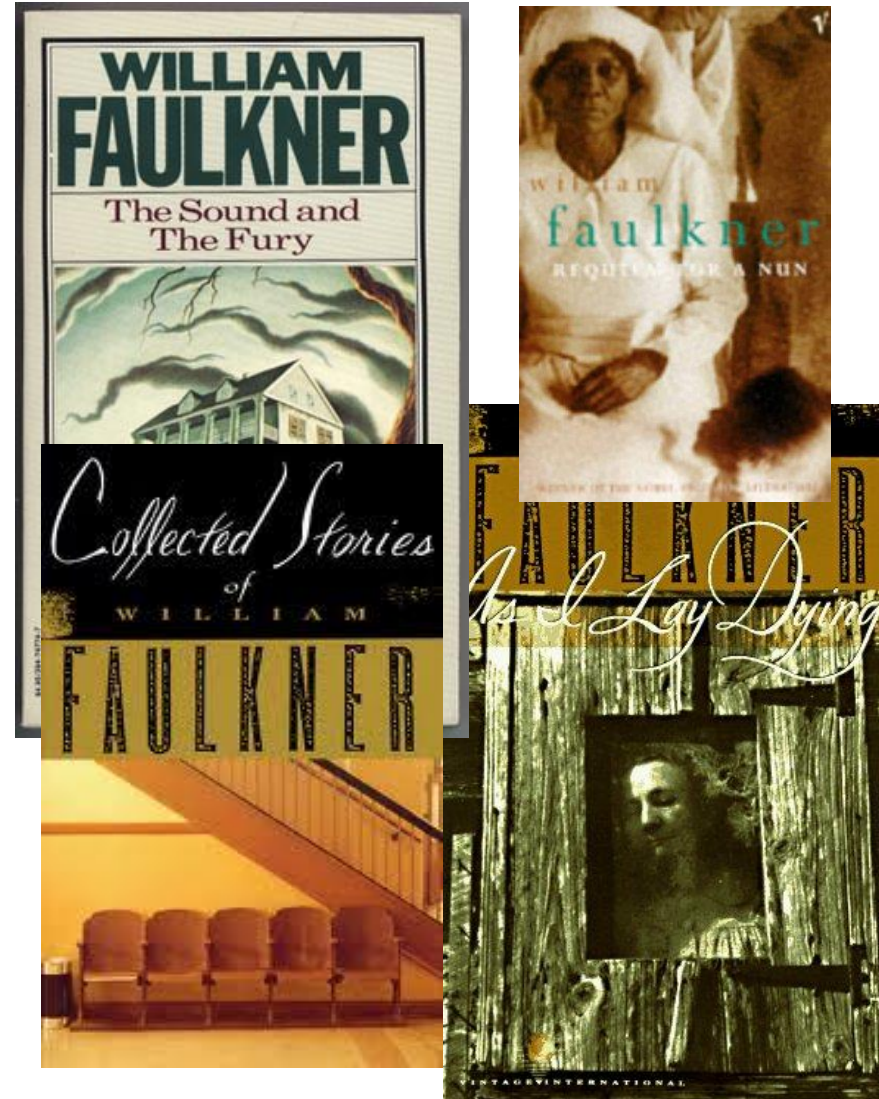
- 1) a strong historical consciousness
- 2) an agricultural tradition
- 3) the existence of of an oral story-telling tradition
- 4) the question of race; tense relationships between the blacks and the whites
- 5) ubiquitous presence of black and southern dialects
- 6) strange concepts of God and responsibility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

# 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*.

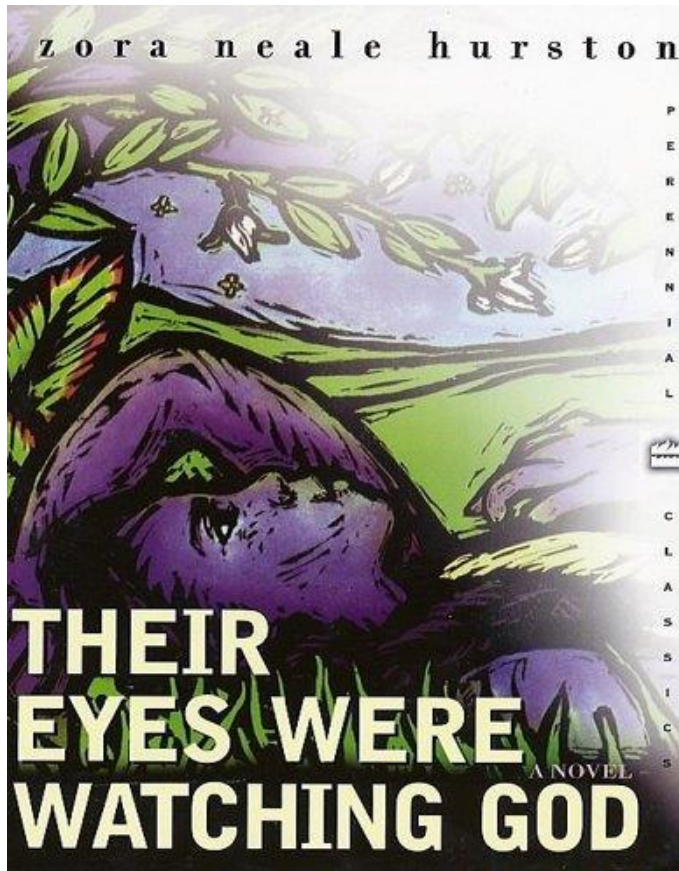


# The Harlem Renaissance

– 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.



# *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.

# *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

- So the beginning of this was a woman and she had come back from burying the dead. Not the dead of sick and ailing with friends at the pillow and the feet. She had come back from the sodden and the bloated; the sudden dead, their eyes flung wide open in judgment.
- The people all saw her come because it was sundown. The sun was gone, but he had left his footprints in the sky. It was the time for sitting on porches beside the road. It was the time to hear things and talk. These sitters had been tongueless, earless, eyeless conveniences all day long. Mules and other brutes had occupied their skins. But now, the sun and the bossman were gone, so the skins felt powerful and human. They became lords of sounds and lesser things. They passed nations through their mouths. They sat in judgment.



# *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

- Seeing the woman as she was made them remember the envy they had stored up from other times. So they chewed up the back parts of their minds and swallowed with relish. They made burning statements with questions, and killing tools out of laughs. It was mass cruelty. A mood come alive, Words walking without masters; walking altogether like harmony in a song.
- "What she doin coming back here in dem overalls? Can't she find no dress to put on? -- Where's dat blue satin dress she left here in? -- Where all dat money her husband took and died and left her? -- What dat ole forty year ole 'oman doin' wid her hair swingin' down her back lak some young gal? Where she left dat young lad of a boy she went off here wid? -- Thought she was going to marry? -- Where he left her? -- What he done wid all her money? -- Betcha he off wid some gal so young she ain't even got no hairs -- why she don't stay in her class?" (Hurstons)