

INTRODUCTION TO UNIT 8

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I. AFTERMATH OF WORLD WAR II

1942, critic Alfred Kazin published 1st book, *On Native Grounds* (= "every last detail of American world + deep and subtle alienation from it") -->

1945, explosion of atomic bomb over Hiroshima ==> end World War II

Cold war America <--> Russia ==> 1950s --> Cuban missile crisis, 1962 + civil rights movement, 1960s + assassination of John F. Kennedy, 1963 + assassination of brother Robert & Martin Luther King (chief spokesman for civil rights & leader of black Americans) + Vietnam war + violence in urban ghettos + killing of 4 students by National Guard, 1970 (Kent State University) + resignation in 1974 of President Richard Nixon

I.1. SOUTHERN WRITERS

1945-60 as a unit = individually talented novelists & short-story writers

(predominance of women + related to William Faulkner)

Older writers = Katherine Anne Porter's *Ship of Fools*, 1962 & Eudora Welty's *The Golden Apples*, 1947 ==> Younger = Carson McCullers's *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, 1940 & *The Member of the Wedding*, 1946 +

Truman Capote's *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, 1948 === Absorption in grotesque + extreme & perverse incongruities of character/scene + verbal effects == commitment to "art" -> True & adequate response to bizarre life

Flannery O'Connor = most talented & humorous: "any fiction that comes out of the South is going to be called grotesque by the Northern reader -unless it is grotesque, in which case it's going to be called realistic" (+ Peter Taylor & Walker Percy) ==> absorbed American speech + manners + habits of eating/praying/loving & no engagement with public/social happenings

I.2. NEW YORK WRITERS

Milieu = urban-Jewish + concerns more public & political (less overtly)
Partisan Review (<-- *Commentary*), 1930s/1940s/1950s (poetry, fiction, drama, fine arts & Continental literature, politics & sociological thought) ==> Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March* & *Seize the Day* + Bernard Malamud + Mailer (Delmore Schwartz) & Flannery O'Connor + James Baldwin + Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* & Lionel Trilling's *The Liberal Imagination*, 1948 + P. Rahv, I. Howe, E. Hardwick & D. Trilling & M. McCarthy + H. Arendt's political writing + C. Greenberg's art criticism
 1960 regional/ethnic senses of identity became diluted = "assimilated" Jews in Philip Roth's *Goodbye, Columbus*, 1959 + southerners in Walker Percy 1963 + *The New York Review of Books* --> success (essayists & reviewers)

II. THE "TRANQUILLIZED FIFTIES"

Good time for serious American writers <--> materialistic nation
 Bellow's *Seize the Day*, 1956 + Jack Kerouac & "The Beat Generation" == San Francisco school = poets Allen Ginsberg & Gregory Corso (*City Lights* Bookstore run by Lawrence Ferlinghetti) ==> jazz accompaniment +

veneration to Whitman, Buddha & Eastern religions + Western beer + drugs
 ==> "spontaneity" <--> constricting forms (poetic/political) --> Kerouac's *The Subterraneans*, 1958 (3 nights) <==> worked-over lyrics/ingeniously worked-out novels of 1950s + good at clowning + comic touches

III. THE HECTIC 1960S

New possibilities & opportunities on both public & private levels
 Election of John F. Kennedy (Frost: "new Augustan age of poetry and power")
 + Russia to cease nuclear testing in atmosphere + increasing concern for
 changes in relationship whites-blacks + loosening up of sexual codes &
 official censorship ==> + life-affirming -- restrictive era
 1950s: Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer & Tropic of Capricorn* + Vladimir
 Nabokov's *Lolita* + D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* & Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*, 1948 & *The Time of Her Time*, 1959
 "Liberation" from official standards of correctness of journalistic essay
 --> Mailer's *Advertisement for Myself*, 1959 (unconventional essay book)
 Tom Wolfe: style became something to cultivate and exaggerate
 Susan Sontag's *Against Interpretation*, 1966 --> aesthetic response to life/art
 Times were changing ==> listening to Beatles/morals of *Playboy* magazine

III.1. SATIRIC PERFORMANCES

We can't determine effect on literary modes of events (Kennedy's assassination
 + Vietnam + riots in black ghettos + turmoil in universities + murder of Robert
 Kennedy & Martin Luther King + omnipresence of drugs + pornography (sex

"revolution") + decline of "family" & upsurge of women's liberation -> no representational/realistic modes of portrayal of Howells, Dreiser, Dos Passos
 ==> Satire = traditional way of dealing with disasters/upheavals --> "black humor" fast & loose with ordinary values & standards + cruelty & shock ==> the awful + ugly + "sick" = Lenny Bruce's verbal & auditory powers
 + Mailer's speech to Lyndon Johnson, 1965 + James Baldwin's (Whites to accept Blacks) + Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, 1966 + Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*, 1969 + Vladimir Nabokov <==> Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, 1970 & John Updike's *Rabbit Redux*, 1971 (combative of "liberations")