

THE SECOND WORLD WAR IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

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XTA/22.7 2nd year bachelor

Abstract: Post-World War II American literature was marked by a number of significant developments and changes. The war had a profound impact on American society and culture, and this was reflected in the literature of the time. Post-World War II American literature is characterized by a variety of themes and styles. One of the most significant developments of this period was the emergence of the Beat Generation, a group of writers who rejected mainstream American culture and sought to explore new forms of expression. Post-World War II American literature was also marked by a growing sense of disillusionment with the American Dream, as writers began to question the values and ideals of mainstream society.

Keywords: Post-world war II, American literature, beat generation, modernist writers.

Introduction The post-World War II era in American literature was characterized by a sense of disillusionment and skepticism towards traditional values and institutions. The trauma and devastation of the war had left a deep impact on the collective psyche of Americans, and this was reflected in the literature of the time. One of the most significant literary movements of the post-war era was the Beat Generation, which emerged in the 1950s. The Beat writers rejected mainstream values and celebrated non-conformity, experimentation, and spontaneity. Their works often explored themes of alienation, self-discovery, and the search for meaning in a world that seemed devoid of it. Prominent writers associated with the Beat Generation include Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and William S. Burroughs. Another important literary movement of the post-war era was the confessional poetry movement, which emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This movement was characterized by poets who wrote deeply personal and often autobiographical works that explored themes of love, loss, and mental illness. Prominent poets

associated with the confessional poetry movement include Sylvia Plath, Robert Lowell, and Anne Sexton. In addition to these movements, there were also many writers who explored the impact of the war on American society and culture. For example, Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* satirized the absurdity of war and military bureaucracy, while Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* explored the psychological trauma of war and the nature of time. Overall, the post-World War II era in American literature was marked by a rejection of traditional values and institutions, a focus on personal experience and self-expression, and an exploration of the impact of war on individuals and society.

The period between the two World Wars, particularly the 1920s and 1930s, is often referred to as the “second flowering” of American writing. This era saw a burst of literary creativity and experimentation that had a profound impact on American literature and culture. During this time, American writers began to break away from traditional literary forms and styles, and instead embraced new techniques and themes. Modernist writers such as Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and William Faulkner explored themes of disillusionment, fragmentation, and the loss of traditional values. They also experimented with new narrative techniques, such as stream-of-consciousness and non-linear storytelling. In addition to the modernists, this period also saw the emergence of the Harlem Renaissance, a cultural movement that celebrated African American art, literature, and music. Writers such as Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Claude McKay produced works that celebrated black culture and identity, while also addressing issues such as racial discrimination and inequality. The «second flowering” of American writing was a period of great creativity and innovation, one that helped to shape the course of American literature in the decades to come.

The literary historian Malcolm Cowley described the years between the two world wars as a “second flowering” of American writing. Certainly American literature attained a new maturity and a rich diversity in the 1920s and '30s, and significant works by several major figures from those decades were published after

1945. Faulkner, Hemingway, Steinbeck, and Katherine Anne Porter wrote memorable fiction, though not up to their prewar standard; and Frost, Eliot, Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, E.E. Cummings, William Carlos Williams, and Gwendolyn Brooks published important poetry. Eugene O'Neill's most distinguished play, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, appeared posthumously in 1956. Before and after World War II, Robert Penn Warren published influential fiction, poetry, and criticism. His *All the King's Men*, one of the best American political novels, won the 1947 Pulitzer Prize. Mary McCarthy became a widely read social satirist and essayist. When it first appeared in the United States in the 1960s, *But its loose, picaresque, quasiautobiographical form* also meshed well with post-1960s fiction. Impressive new novelists, poets, and playwrights emerged after the war. There was, in fact, a gradual changing of the guard. Not only did a new generation come out of the war, but its ethnic, regional, and social character was quite different from that of the preceding one. Among the younger writers were children of immigrants, many of them Jews; African Americans, only a few generations away from slavery; and, eventually, women, who, with the rise of feminism, were to speak in a new voice. Though the social climate of the postwar years was conservative, even conformist, some of the most hotly discussed writers were homosexuals or bisexuals, including Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote, Paul Bowles, Gore Vidal, and James Baldwin, whose dark themes and experimental methods cleared a path for Beatwriters such as Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, and Jack Kerouac.

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