

ETHNIC AMERICAN LITERATURE

~ red. prof. dr. Jerneja Petrič, štud. leto 2004/2005 ~

- ❖ 1970's – a kind of revival took place in America; a book by Alex Haley, *The Roots*, was published ~ he was a journalist by profession and decided to search for his roots (difficult because his ancestors were brought from Africa by force); he found his roots in Gambia, from where his predecessor, who became a slave, came.
- ❖ WASP – White Anglo-Saxon Protestants ~ those people who originally came from England, from the Anglo-Saxon world.
- ❖ all other people in America were ETHNIC (so-called hyphenated Americans) ~ they eventually became very interested in their origins, tried to preserve their value & importance.
- ❖ children of the immigrants, the 2nd generation, were a split generation ~ their parents wanted them to preserve their roots, their language, but the children didn't want to be different from the WASP children who ridiculed them.
- ❖ only the 3rd generation realised that they should be proud of their origins.
- ❖ melting pot (originally a title of a play by a Jewish author) – the immigrants should cast away everything that was typical of their culture, they should be like the WASP, "real" Americans.
- ❖ cultural diversity – a movement that encouraged the ethnic groups to preserve and/or revive their habits, beliefs, etc.
- ❖ there were several waves of immigrants from Europe – they were attracted by the myths about America, where everything was supposed to be possible.
- ❖ The first people to go to America were missionaries who were to convert the Indians to their own religions (Protestant, Catholic).
- ❖ middle of the 19th century – mass immigrations began (the first to go were the northern people – Swedes, Norwegians, Finns). Toward the end of the century also people from other parts of Europe came.
- ❖ the immigrants were not well accepted by the WASP, so they usually worked in mines, on fields (= difficult labour) for practically no money.
- ❖ xenophobia began to rise with the rising number of immigrants; pejorative names were used (PIGS = Poles, Italians, Greeks, Slaves; Hunkie; Bohunks).
- ❖ Ellis Island – the 1st stop in America where the immigrants were thoroughly checked (medical examination, bureaucracy).
- ❖ the immigrants had to get used to completely different lifestyles – the pace in American was much faster.
- ❖ the reasons for immigration were mainly economic.
- ❖ many people went back and forth between America and their homeland for several times; however, many stayed for good, despite nostalgia and alienation from their homeland (mostly because they didn't have enough money for the voyage).

SCANDINAVIAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

- ☞ reaches its peak in 1880
- ☞ after the 1st WW the xenophobia was very strong, however it produced one of the most important pieces of literature (from Norwegian branch) – **Ole Edvard Rølvaag** (1876-1931); **Giants in the Earth** (1924, 1927), **Peder Victorious** (a sequel) (1929)
- ☞ Ole was supposed to become a fisherman, but was put off because his friend died in an accident at sea
- ☞ he travelled to America's Midwest, to his uncle; at first he was a farmer, but later went to school and became a professor of Norwegian language at the College of St. Olaf
- ☞ **GIANTS IN THE EARTH** – pioneering, immigrations, difficulties which the pioneers were faced with; written originally in Norwegian (1924), then translated into English (1927) ~ subtitled A Saga* of the Prairie.

* alluding to the previous migrations of Norwegians (Vikings)

- ∅ Homestead Act, 1862 (signed by Lincoln, came into effect in Jan, 1863) – both WASP and immigrants were given land practically for free, they paid only \$18 for administration fees
- ∅ a homesteader had to be the head of a family, had to be at least 21 years old, had to be either an American citizen or waiting for naturalisation; at first the land was given to them for 5 years (a trial period), they had to build a home, make improvements; if they succeeded (to turn the prairie into good soil), they could “prove up” and become owners of their land
this sounded easy, but they soil was very hard and dry, it demanded irrigation (= money); as a consequence, only a third of the initial claimants of the land succeeded
- ∅ **Giants in the Earth** speaks about homesteaders, people who came to South Dakota and build their settlements there, claimed their land in the Midwest;
- ∅ Per Hansa and his family make the long journey on foot and on wagons
- ∅ the climate was very harsh – if s.b. died during the cold winter, he/she was stored in the snow until the snow melted and the ground thawed so that they could be buried
- ∅ their crops were often destroyed by locusts, there were Indian attacks
- ∅ because there were not trees in the prairie, there were no bird – if nobody spoke there was absolute silence
- ∅ the translation of the novel isn't Rølvaag's, but she participated and gave advice to the translator
- ∅ the novel begins with the travel of Per Hansa, his wife and children (2 boys and a girl) and a few other Norwegians to the prairie of South Dakota
- ∅ they are on their way to the Dakota plains to establish a “kingdom” – this means a prosperous farm in Norwegian folklore; Per Hansa wants to establish his own kingdom.
- ∅ when the novel came out in English, it was very popular, it was the book of the month in The Book of the Month Club established by Sherman in 1926 (only a year before G.i.t.E. came out)
- ∅ to become a selection of The Book of the Month Club meant that a book would sell an enormous amount of copies – the novel made Rølvaag famous and rich
- ∅ this is an unprecedented case, because a translation into English became a part of the American tradition (usually only books originally written in English do so)
- ∅ the novel has 2 parts: part 1 begins in 1873 with the immigration of the small caravan of Norwegians
- ∅ they are on their own, trying to make their way through the prairie (difficult because there was only the sun for orientation, no trees, no mountains)
- ∅ they are trying to find their friends who went ahead and didn't wait when Per Hansa's wagon broke down
- ∅ eventually they find them, but before that we learn that the Hansa's came from a small fishing village in Norway, took a ship across the ocean and continued on foot & by wagons
- ∅ there are 2 Norwegian families and 2 single men
- ∅ they claim each their own land; Per Hansa is the most hardworking, he works the land as if possessed
- ∅ they built their houses with turf or made dug-outs
- ∅ P.H. works enormous patches of earth by hand; it is very hard work, but he is the 1st to plant potatoes and other crops (in June) and has his first crops already in the autumn
- ∅ P.H. is enthusiastic, he never regrets their move; his wife Beret on the other hand is ever more depressed, pregnant with their fourth child and hopes that P.H. will realise that they have to move back
- ∅ Beret is troubled also by the silence of the prairie
- ∅ there are Indians (peaceful) and when Beret discovers their graves one day on her walk, this adds to her depression
- ∅ she is also lonely when the men set out to buy provisions and clothing in far away settlement
- ∅ P.H. doesn't take her depression seriously, there is no problem as far as he is concerned
- ∅ B. begins to believe that God is punishing her for her youthful disobedience – her parents disapproved of P.H., he was too young, too wild, too reckless
- ∅ but when she became pregnant there was no going back, so they married
- ∅ B. never really objected the move, she only tried to postpone it
- ∅ now she believes that God punishes her because she disobeyed her parents

- ∅ she gives birth to a boy on Christmas day, P.H. names him Peder Victorious (to symbolise their victory over the land)
- ∅ **1st book:** pioneering the working of the land, initial problems, 1st six months in the prairie
- ∅ **2nd book** (subtitle: Founding the Kingdom): it begins in the winter, 4 years later, they are snowed in, but P.H. finds ways to amuse his sons (they catch fish as long as the can, they shoot ducks)
- ∅ there is also a kind of a school, the two single men function as teachers
- ∅ more problems: spring frost, locusts (come every year)
- ∅ B.'s condition grows worse, after the locusts' invasion she completely loses her mind (it's all God's punishment for their vanity)
- ∅ one day a travelling pastor comes – he comes regularly from then on; his visits restore some of B.'s sanity, but she becomes fanatically pious
- ∅ one of their neighbours falls severely ill and there is a no hope that he would survive the winter – B. wants the priest to come so that the man could confess before death
- ∅ she makes P.H. leave the shelter to go and find the priest – he never comes back, his children find him dead in the spring, propped against a haystack, with his skis still on and his face turned towards the West
- ∅ the title of the novel is taken from the Bible, from the Book of Genesis
- ∅ neighbours: Tønseten, Hans Olsa
- ∅ **main conflict** is the conflict between P.H.'s positive feelings and pioneering spirit? and B.'s nostalgia, home sickness, feeling of guilt
- ∅ in the process of translation they came across many parts which were practically intranslatable + the two Solum boys spoke a Norwegian dialect which is lost in translation
- ∅ another thing that is lost is the gradual creeping in of English words into Norwegian (they used a mixed language; this is not visible in the translation) – this is important because it shows the process of assimilation and how the immigrants slowly adapted to the American culture
- ∅ the 1st generation of immigrants lived in constant conflict between their love for the new country (develop, prosper, achieve what they hoped for) and their memories and love for the old country
- ∅ the nostalgia didn't let them enjoy the new life as well as they could
- ∅ many immigrants began to idolise their homeland, they focused only on the good
- ∅ P.H. = love for the new country, B. = nostalgia, remorse, love for the old country
- ∅ P.H. is a true pioneer – he is all for progress and America, he doesn't bother about what he left behind; B.'s mind is mostly occupied with sadness and guilt
- ∅ P.H. paints the inner walls of his house white, making it more like a real house
- ∅ he eventually builds a wooden house – but nothing he does can convince B. that they are better off than they were in Norway
- ∅ in the end, it is B. who causes her husband's death – his face is turned towards the West (= a new beginning, progress, prosperity)
- ∅ P.H. faces the West – this symbolises his faith that eventually all will turn out well for his children
- ∅ Rølvaag believed that at least for the 1st generation of immigrants the loss was greater than the gain
- ∅ they may have gained material things, but lost their homeland and identity
- ∅ **major themes:**
 - central theme = **pioneering, the achievements of the immigrants** (important because the Americans are aware that they are all descendants of immigrants, immigration = the quintessence of America), **going West** (connected with pioneering; has a symbolic meaning of a fresh start, of a new beginning, in Per Hansa's eyes means a positive change – he is a true pioneer), **assimilation & adaptation** (didn't come easily for the immigrants; assimilation = melting pot – it required a completely new beginning, they were supposed to abandon everything (culture, festivities, tradition) – they were supposed to change their identity; the price the 1st generation had to pay was very high), **nostalgia, homesickness** (in this novel represented in Beret, who uses religion as a shield, she finds a personal salvation in religion when she realises

she won't be going back to Norway), **Indians** (Rølvaag paints an objective picture of them – they are peaceful, but can become hostile when they feel endangered)

- ✂ problems with translation: Norwegian dialect, Americanisms
- ✂ despite the problems with translation, the English text conveys Rølvaag's powerful language adequately
- ✂ the tragedy of Per Hansa is that it takes him so long to realise that Beret wasn't one of the people who were glad to immigrate – he makes a confession to the priest towards the end of the novel
- ✂ the novel consists of 2 books; **book 1** ends with the birth of their fourth child; this book covers a period of 6 months; **book 2** covers a period of several years
- ✂ the nature is like the third main character; it is never neutral – if it is seen through Per Hansa's eyes, it is always beautiful, if it is seen through Beret's eyes, it is often grey, depressed
- ✂ in a way Beret outgrows the limits of an individual and becomes a symbol of nostalgia and homesickness the immigrants felt

JEWISH AMERICAN LITERATURE

- ✂ during the 20th century, Jewish authors became prominent
- ✂ the early works (beginning of the 20th century) described the initial problems of the immigrants, later they were replaced by feeling of not belonging to the mainstream society, marginalisation
- ...
- ✂ the majority of Jews came from the tsarist Russia
- ✂ NY was the centre of Jewish Americans, they mainly lived in Brooklyn, in the Lower East Side
- ✂ they lived in over-crowded tenements; they were extremely poor and uncomfortable
- ✂ the Jews who escaped from Russia or other Eastern European countries, worked either as street peddlers (*krošņjar*; BrE: *pedlar*) or in sweatshops (mainly owned by Jews, they produced clothing – they worked 14-16 hours a day for a meagre pay)
- ✂ the Jews were political immigrants, there were many educated people among them (they achieved in the 1st generation what others achieved only in the 2nd or 3rd generations)
- ✂ **Abraham Cahan** (1860-1951) – journalist, fiction writer – explored the cultural and spiritual life of Jews in America
- ✂ he focused on the dual identities of his characters (old country – new country, jewnness – americanness), the price the immigrants had to pay in the process of assimilation
- ✂ he was born in tsarist Russia, his father was a Hebrew teacher
- ✂ he discarded the traditional Jewish clothes to be able to go to a library in Vilna because Jews were not allowed to enter
- ✂ 1882 – emigrated to NY, he soon became the leading figure in his society, taught others English and wrote stories in English, Russian and Hebrew
- ✂ he was instrumental for the establishment of Jewish Daily Forward, the central Jewish newspaper (as an editor, he promoted conversational Yiddish – a mixture of Hebrew and English) and other Jewish authors
- ✂ a Bundle of Letters – the earliest advice column in American – people wrote to him (e.g. could a Jewish man marry a non-Jewish woman ...)
- ✂ his career as a writer began when his story in Yiddish was published (it attracted Howells who saw its quality and he encouraged Cohan to write a longer text)
- ✂ **The Important Bridegroom**
- ✂ **The Rise of David Levinsky** (1917) (lost of assimilation, conflicts of gaining material wealth)
- ✂ **Yekl, A Tale of the New York Ghetto** (1896)
- ✂ a greenhorn – a pejorative term for a newcomer from Europe, used by WASP
- ✂ he was inspired by Tolstoy, Chekhov, Howells, Frank Norris and Theodore Dreiser
- ✂ when Yekl was published, Howells proclaimed it for a new star of realism
- ✂ social reality of Jewish immigration – the main theme of Cahan's novels

☞ **THE RISE OF DAVID LEVINSKY**

- ☞ 1913 – a longer text in 2 instalments in a newspaper, The Autobiography of an American Jew, was published – written in the 1st person sg., describes the rise from rags to richer
- ☞ later he expanded it to the story of David Levinsky (1917)
- ☞ D.L. is the narrator, an old man, he made it in America; he remembers his origins fondly, he is critical of his life
- ☞ the story begins in Russia, his father dies when he is 3, his mother tries very hard to provide for her son
- ☞ she sends him to school, but for a period he has to quit it in order to work for a living and earn money
- ☞ eventually, he is quite well educated, he becomes an instructor of Talmud
- ☞ his mother is beaten to death, he somehow manages to survive and eventually finds a wealthy benefactor who gives him the money for the immigration
- ☞ in American, he changes his appearance because he doesn't want to look like a greenhorn
- ☞ he becomes a peddler, but is humiliated by this job
- ☞ he uses his intelligence to climb the social ladder, he opens a sweatshop of his own and eventually becomes a millionaire
- ☞ he wants to marry and have a family, but he never does
- ☞ there's also a religious aspect – he is raised as an orthodox Jew, reads the Talmud (in America, he soon realises that to make it there, reading the Talmud (spiritual work) is not enough, he has to do sth. more substantial)
- ☞ many Jews drop the Jewish rites and tradition (they eat pork, don't go to the readings of the Talmud ...)
- ☞ he wants to be an exemplary Jew, but is tempted too much by various women (also prostitutes) (on one hand he is very immoral, but he puts up a front and acts as though he is still a good Jew)
- ☞ he is often lonely; the older he grows, the more traditional he becomes – he wants to marry a real Jewish woman
- ☞ at the end he is divided within himself; he is successful, but lonely, torn between the old and the new life (poor Jewish boy vs. a successful clothes manufacturer)
- ☞ <http://www.eldritchpress.org/cahan/rdl.htm>
- ☞ the novel is a fictitious autobiography, but is a credible story of an immigrants (his arrival, assimilation)
- ☞ he arrives as a young man, vulnerable and naïve
- ☞ when he first lands, he observes similarities between America and Russia – cats, unfriendly bureaucrats (differences = tall buildings)
- ☞ what shakes him most is the recognition that America doesn't want his intellect, but only his manual skills
- ☞ Bowling Green – the place where the rich Jew took away his shipmate; also a name of a university – pointing to David's intellect and the loss of its importance
- ☞ the time of utmost loneliness and gratefulness for any friendly word – right after he comes to NY
- ☞ Jews in America are not like those back in Russia, they have assimilated outwardly and also in the way they were thinking
- ☞ the text is older than The Giants in the Earth
- ☞ D.L. arrives to US as an orphan; he wants to study in America and become an educated man – soon he discovers that the real America was far from the myth of America spread throughout Europe (in America just pick up the money and become rich)
- ☞ he started as a manual labourer (as a peddler) in order to survive, but his intellect soon helped him to rise in the world
- ☞ the yearning for knowledge didn't leave him at once, but slowly died away almost completely with this rise and growing wealth
- ☞ the novel contains also many accurate elements from the Jews' history
- ☞ there were tensions between Jewish parents and American born children; they had to adjust to a new value system

- ☞ the novel is a critique of the American Dream – American success ethic
- ☞ it can be compared with novels of Anglo-Saxon authors and ethnic novels which were mainstream literature in those days

- ☞ Cahan introduces the subject matter of Jewish immigrants which other authors don't
- ☞ David's Americanisation begins with the first day of his arrival; he looks like, behaves like, talks like Americans
- ☞ his conscience haunts him, he sometimes regrets that he was so completely changed
- ☞ change was necessary, survival of the fittest
- ☞ after a period of time going to the Synagogue became fashionable among the Jews
- ☞ Cahan treats his characters with compassion and impartiality
- ☞ David's ghetto – the Lower East Side – largest Yiddish speaking area in America, over 100 thousand people
- ☞ Cahan compares also German Jews (1st owners of the sweatshops) and Eastern-European Jews (gradually managed to take over, after 1880 they began to draw the big German Jew companies out of business)
- ☞ Cahan takes pride in the achievements of his people but also proclaims business ambitions as demoralising
- ☞ after the WWI, the Jewish community began to diminish (at the time of the novel it was at its peak)
- ☞ when the novel came out in 1917 it was not a bestseller, it wasn't liked because the people didn't want to be reminded of the poverty they have just emerged out of
- ☞ only the 3rd generation, which was not burdened by the ghetto past, was more willing to view the past with calm impartiality and nostalgia
- ☞ the novel is praised today; with his novel Cahan set a pattern, repeated in the works of other Jewish authors (America = materialism, Jewishness = spirituality, materialism = spiritual failure)

☞ **Willa Cather**

- ☞ WASP, but a keen observer of the immigrant life, their struggles
- ☞ appreciated and honoured while she was alive, but then fell into oblivion
- ☞ today she is often discussed and considered one of the most important ethnic authors in America
- ☞ she used facts she learned firsthand in the early years of her life in her works
- ☞ when she was about 20, she and her family moved to Red Cloud, Nebraska from Virginia and in her novel she uses the name Black Hawk for the town
- ☞ Nebraska (it was the frontier, populated by immigrants – a mix of nationalities) was then still an untamed and virgin land
- ☞ they moved because of Willa's health problems (she had tuberculosis)
- ☞ in Nebraska, she came in contact with many immigrants, she saw they lived in dug-outs, dug into a hill (moist, cold, dark, full of insects); she saw their fight for survival and she noticed there was no cultural life in the prairie; she was drawn towards the poorest of the poor, she befriended a Bohemian girl (who was later the model for *Ántonia*)
- ☞ she lived there for two years, then moved back to urban environment and studies at the Uni. of Nebraska
- ☞ she wrote drama reviews and her own stories
- ☞ later she moved to Pennsylvania, where she had an editorial job
- ☞ 1906 – she attracted the attention of a publisher in NY, this was her breakthrough
- ☞ she loved Europe and travelled there quite often
- ☞ 1912 – she wrote her 1st novel, Alexander's Bridge (not immigration theme)
- ☞ Peter – a story published in a magazine
- ☞ Neighbor Rosicky – novel (often anthologised)
- ☞ novels dealing with the pioneer theme:
 - O Pionners! (1913)
 - The Song of the Lark (1915)
 - My Ántonia (1918)

☞ **MY ÁNTONIA**

- ☞ good reviews, marked her career and established her as a good author
- ☞ the protagonist is a woman, *Antonia*, a Czech immigrant
- ☞ feminist approach, natural app. – descriptions of nature, ethnic approach
- ☞ immigrant experience & migration within the US (trains, cars began to appear)
- ☞ narrator = Jim Burden (Willa's alter ego) – she just changed the sex; there were rumours that she was a lesbian and her novel wouldn't be accepted if the narrator were a woman

- ☞ Jim and Antonia knew each other as children, then lost contact, but Jim renewed it later
- ☞ as children, they arrive to the prairie on the same train
- ☞ Jim comes to live with his grandparents (= nice, generous) because his parents died
- ☞ Antonia is the oldest daughter of 4 children
- ☞ Jim soon meets Antonia also when they are settled, she is the girl from the train
- ☞ the Shimerdas lived in a dug-out, Antonia's father is an educated musician, her mother is a coarse woman, she complains and demands all the time
- ☞ Antonia is very grown-up for her age, she is hardworking
- ☞ Jim likes the prairie, he soon discovers that his grandparents' neighbours are the Shimerdas, the family whom he saw on the train
- ☞ Antonia, Ambrosch, Marek, Yulka
- ☞ Jim is appalled to see how poor the Shimerdas are and sees that Mr. Shimerda cannot adjust to the life in the prairie
- ☞ the neighbours try to help them, but Mrs. Shimerda doesn't express any gratitude
- ☞ Jim and Antonia explore the prairie together
- ☞ there are stories which appear to have nothing in common with the main story – Peter&Pavel, 2 Russian immigrants, Mr. Shimerda's only friends; Pavel tells Mr. Shimerda a story – he was once at a wedding and saved his life by throwing the bride and the bridegroom to the wolves)
- ☞ Pavel dies and his death crushed Mr. Shimerda – he commits suicide
- ☞ after his death, Antonia has to quit school because nobody else from the family is of any use and she has to work to provide for them (she works like a man, doing men's job)
- ☞ Jim moves to Black Hawk and somehow manages to provide a job for Antonia; she works as a domestic worker, a hired girl
- ☞ Antonia goes to dances until her employers forbid her to (it's not decent)
- ☞ Jim leaves Black Hawk and goes to study and he becomes very attached to his teacher
- ☞ he meets a hired girl named Lena (= a Norwegian girl) and feels a physical attraction for her (different than attraction for Antonia)
- ☞ in the meantime, Antonia got pregnant with a man who then left her
- ☞ 20 years after, Jim and Antonia see each other again, she is married to a Bohemian man, they have children and they're happy (Antonia did good, she succeeded)
- ☞ the dirt road leading to the house of Jim's grandparents = a road of destiny for Jim and Antonia – he sees this road when he goes hunting with Antonia's sons

- ☞ TOPICS:
- ☞ importance of education (Jim succeeds, Antonia has to quit school)
- ☞ class stratification
- ☞ importance of family (Jim's an orphan; Antonia has her family when she needs them – though they're not perfect)

- ☞ nature is a "protagonist"
- ☞ it is episodic, with in-set stories
- ☞ ethnicity is presented through stories such as the story of Peter&Pavel (stories of survival, a matter of live and death)
- ☞ Antonia is modelled after a woman named Anna Pavelka, a good friend of Willa's

- ☞ book 1 – 1 year
- ☞ book 2 – 2 years have passed between book 1 and book 2

- ☞ **Wallace Stegner: Angle of Repose**
- ☞ distinction between 2 kinds of Americans: placed persons (don't have to move, spend their lives in one place), displaced persons (go away, travel long distances – ex. Daniel Boone, a frontier's man); major difference: a placed person explores inwardly, a displaced person explores outwardly

- ☞ Antonia is a placed person, after her arrival to the US, she doesn't travel
- ☞ Jim is a displaced person, he travels

- ☞ Cather: art should simplify, an author should present his/her work simply, comprehensively (an essay: On the Art of Fiction)
- ☞ a plough = a symbol of prairie, of pioneering; a simple tool used to cultivate the earth – food, nourishment, hard work, creativity; development from grass land to cultivated, fertile land
- ☞ Cather attacks stereotypes such as that all immigrants were stupid and untrustworthy
- ☞ she ridicules the “real” American fathers who preferred to keep their daughters inside at all times, instead of sending them to work
- ☞ she touches upon the issue of the American dream
- ☞ she attacks the prejudice that all immigrant girls were easy, that since they worked for their living they couldn’t be good women
- ☞ Jim is outside of the mainstream town’s people, because he doesn’t despise the immigrants but rather sympathises with them
- ☞ Cather’s “ethnic phase” was relatively short, she spent only a few years among the immigrants
- ☞ Jim and Antonia’s relationship is not romantic, but they share a very deep friendship (the bonds that connect them are so deep that they cannot be put into words)
- ☞ Jim is very important to Antonia – in her childhood he was the first link with American, later when she had to quit school because of her father’s death, Jim became her teacher
- ☞ **literary modernism** (1819-1930) – after the WWI it reached its peak
- ☞ characterised by more or less radical forms of experimentation (old assurances provided by church&politics didn’t suffice any more)
- ☞ after WWI many Americans were disillusioned; the Jazz period and materialism set in (people only went to parties, they had no higher goals)
- ☞ writers reacted to the state of affairs, their works were full of disillusionment and despair
- ☞ many artists believed that art replaced religion – it was supposed to give guidance, coherence and insight to people – T.S. Eliot, Robert Frost, Ernest Hemingway
- ☞ experimentation in form and expression (also because of new developments in psychology)
- ☞ prose modernism began with Henry James (a psychological realist, very prolific – he focused on a character and explored his/her psyche; in his works we can detect a connection between prose and painting)
- ☞ authors often chose the linear plot (logical sequence of events), a stronger point was placed on the characters’ psyche
- ☞ American authors who lived abroad included elements of old European and non-European countries (Ezra Pound, Hilda Doolittle, Gertrude Stein – leader of the Lost Generation)
- ☞ authors who chose to stay at home, evoked a sense of disillusionment, despair in the face of rising industrialism and materialism – they were sad because untouched American was disappearing
- ☞ they turned back to the days of pioneers, to unspoilt America – this movement was called primitivism (here belongs also Cather, even though she is a modernist)
- ☞ Antonia – no linear plot, Antonia often disappears from the story
- ☞ Cather moves between realistic (Struggle of the immigrants, Mr. Shimerda’s suicide) and poetic mode (friendship J&A, nature)
- ☞ her representation of the American frontier is a perfect balance for the modern urban society
- ☞ My Antonia – the title tells us that she was Jim’s Antonia
- ☞ Cather wanted to make Antonia larger than life, she outgrows the limits of an individual and becomes Earth mother (a prototype of a strong immigrant woman who persists against all odds), she is the sustainer of life, the provider)

AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

- ☞ began with slave narratives, written and published even before the abolition of slavery
- ☞ slave narratives were usually written by escaped slaves who could read and write
- ☞ they were sold on various anti-slave meetings; they were all 1st person accounts of the life of a slave

☼ **Harlem Renaissance** – a literary movement that began in Harlem, NY, around 1923, flourished to the onset of depression, but even later there were echoes of it

☼ **Langston Hughes** (The Weary Blues, Red-headed Baby)

☼ **Jean Toomer** (Cane, 1923)

☼ **Claude McKay**

☼ **Countee Cullen**

☼ **James Weldon Johnson**

☼ **Zora Neale Hurston**

☼ **Nella Larsen**

☼ **Sterling Brown**



☼ in 1920 became the first ever black officer of NAACP (the Crisis was their magazine), established by white people

☼ in 1922, the Am. Congress passes the anti-

☼ 1923 – a negro paper, Opportunity, was established; it became the voice of the black

☼ Claude McKay went to Moscow and spoke at a congress of the Fourth International – many blacks sought alliance with the proletariat of communist society (not a way out)

☼ 1925 – Locke published a book, The New Negro (Harlem Ren. was first called the New Negro movement), Langston Hughes & Hurston (?) receive literary awards

☼ 1927 – Duke Ellington, Armstrong began their careers

☼ 1929 – stock exchange crash, beginning of depression (blacks were hit the worst by it)

☼ 1935 – the Race Riot in Hamlet

☼ the above mentioned authors worked in all genres – prose, poetry, drama, essay writing

☼ W.E.B. Du Bois spoke about “two-ness” of black souls

☼ many black people chose to stay with their former masters even after the abolition of slavery

☼ many decided to migrate to the North because they couldn’t stand the racism (they went to NY, Chicago, Washington DC, where they ended up in ghettos)

☼ Harlem Renaissance – authors who either lived there or very attached to it (= the place to be, to create)

☼ H.R. was first called the New Negro movement, after Locke’s essay – they took it for their manifesto (the New Negro is no longer apologetic for their blackness but takes pride in their race and origins)

☼ H.R. coincided with the Jazz Age (people were seeking new ways of life and therefore took interest in black primitivism – many affluent whites became patrons/-esses of black authors)

☼ Carl Van Vechten – an important supporter of the H.R.; in 1926 he published a very popular novel Nigger Heaven

☼ high art vs. primitivism of low negro life (those who celebrated this were encouraged by Jazz Age leaders who were interested in the colourful aspects of negro life – music, dances, but no daily struggles – this idyllic picture was far removed from reality; they pictured Harlem as an exotic jungle of happy people – far from reality)

☼ on the other pole there were authors who were proud of their origins – Hughes’ art is considered as high art today

☼ there was a group of authors which exaggerated race pride, idolised Africa, thought blacks are superior to the decadent western people

☼ some authors thought black authors should fit the mainstream (= white) literature

☼ **Countee Cullen**: “I want to be a poet, not a negro poet.” He wanted to enter the mainstream, but this doesn’t mean his work was bad.

☼ Hughes thought Cullen was a traitor, he wanted to create genuine black literature in which he explored his blackness

☼ H.R. is a very broad term, it covers many different authors

- ☼ **Langston Hughes** (1902-1967)
- ☼ he wrote in several genres (prose, poetry, plays, musicals, essays)
- ☼ he was a public figure, also a journalist and a lecturer
- ☼ he was the editor of several anthologies of black works
- ☼ he grew up in Lawrence, lived also in Chicago and NY
- ☼ he was a fairly neglected child, he read a lot because he was lonely; there were important abolitionists in his family
- ☼ **THE NEGRO SPEAKS OF RIVERS** – a poem, published in *The Crisis*; got a reward
- ☼ he travelled a lot, but then returned to California and published a collection of short stories: **The Ways of White People**
- ☼ L.H. was influenced by: Walt Whitman, Carl Sandburg (let him to free verse and modern aesthetics), Paul Laurence Dunbar, Claude McKay
- ☼ The Weary Blues, Fine Clothes to the Jew – collections of poems blending the traditional verse form ...
- ☼ race pride & artistic independence – in *The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain* (also considered as a manifesto)
- ☼ he got a female patron who enabled him to publish his 1st novel, **Not Without Laughter**; after they had broken up, he was very depressed
- ☼ he published an autobiography in which he completely erased his leftist tendencies and the past
- ☼ later on, he collected his poetry in 5 volumes
- ☼ he was accused of being a communist and had to testify officially about his political inclinations; after McCarthy's demise, he was able to speak about his inclination to communism and his years in the Soviet Union in a book titled **I Wonder as I Wonder**
- ☼ black radicalism is described in another autobiography **The Panther and the Lash**, where he described how hard it was for him when the Black Panthers attacked him because he didn't support their radical views

- ☼ **THE WEARY BLUES** (a poem)
- ☼ won a prize
- ☼ partly written in the negro dialect
- ☼ 2 speakers: the poet and the pianist
- ☼ the poem takes place at night in a bar on Lenox Avenue
- ☼ the fact that the piano player is poor contrasts the romantic idea about blues singers with the black reality
- ☼ the blues singer is weary of the struggle for survival, fighting poverty and racism
- ☼ he does have his music which helps him preserve his identity
- ☼ the blues singer's direct speech is probably taken from a well known song of those time, especially the lines I got the weary blues / And I can't be satisfied
- ☼ repetitions, exclamation, ecstatic language
- ☼ the pianist's weary blues echoes the common weary blues (speaker included) of black people – they're tired and on the verge of giving up
- ☼ the pianist plays the music for money, not for his soul, because his spirit is broken
- ☼ the theme is built on the contrast between light and dark features (= contrast between whites & blacks – e.g. his black fingers touch the white keys of the piano, he plays at night by the dim light of a gas lamp)
- ☼ at the end, the darkness prevails, the atmosphere is glooms
- ☼ the speaker (the poet) is just an observer, he cannot do anything, but he empathises with the pianist because he himself is a suffering black man

- ☼ **RED-HEADED BABY** (a short story)
- ☼ begins as a monologue by a red-headed sailor named Clarence
- ☼ setting: somewhere in Florida
- ☼ his ship just arrived, there's not much to do, so he decides that he'll go and find a girl he had once for one night
- ☼ Betsy was then 17, she's a very light-skinned mulatto
- ☼ they offer him rum and he drinks quite a lot
- ☼ he's drunk and very relaxed, just talking to Betsy

- ☼ just when he's most relaxed, the door opens and a red-headed baby enters
- ☼ he's a miniature version of himself – Clarence then just wants to pay for his liquor (for the first time) and leave, he doesn't want the baby to touch him, he perceives him as vermin
- ☼ Clarence is a prototypical representative of white people who viewed black people (esp. women) as an object to be used and discarded after
- ☼ the baby's red hair is a constant reminder of the fact that he does have a father who doesn't want to be a part of his life
- ☼ Betsy – a representative of black girls who had no prospect in life, no way of getting educated; their only means of getting some money was prostitution
- ☼ this awful treatment of blacks continued even after the abolition
- ☼ the story illustrated the defective relationship between the whites and the blacks
- ☼ the baby symbolises the crippled black race –he is deaf and cannot speak
- ☼ the story is narrated in a simple style which enables the author to portray Clarence's behaviour very vividly
- ☼ there are a lot of visual and sound effects (the latter esp. felt if the story is read aloud), tactile effects (head, mosquito bites, warm sand ...)
- ☼ when Clarence becomes very drunk & relaxed he lapses into a stream of very disconnected thoughts (another stream of thoughts comes after the baby shows himself – C. hurriedly wants to leave, he's anxious – just the opposite to the 1st stream)

☼ **Black Women's Literature in America**

- ☼ contemporary Am. black female authors are very widely read (e.g. Toni Morrison)
- ☼ this revival began in 1970 when some very powerful novels were written by T. Morrison and other female authors
- ☼ at first they wrote realistic slave narratives, but gradually elements of fiction began to seep into the narrative

☼ 1928; Nella Larsen: **Quicksand**

- ☼ after the abolition many things were to be learned by the black people (e.g. before they never had money and so didn't know how to handle it)
- ☼ in the South racism was very severe, but in the North not everything was perfect as well (blacks had to live in ghettos)
- ☼ black men felt that they've lost their masculinity and often took it out on their females

☼ **1940-1950 – 2nd Harlem Renaissance**

- ☼ the black men wrote about racism and their invisibility in the white society
- ☼ black women rather focused on other themes and soon revealed the issue of the victimisation of black women by their own frustrated men

☼ **Zora Neale Hurston** (1891?-1960)

- ☼ she didn't want to write the typical suffering black literature, she wanted to write about her people as they were
- ☼ her mother died when she was young, her father remarried and she felt compelled to leave home because she didn't get along with her stepmother
- ☼ she travelled a lot, doing odd jobs (also as a maid to an actress)
- ☼ she enrolled as a full time student and falsified her birth date (because she was too old to enrol otherwise)
- ☼ she had a patron, an old rich white female – she gave her money to finance her life and career (the only condition was that all her anthropological research belonged to the patron)
- ☼ she went to Haiti where she did anthropological studies
- ☼ she was relatively unpopular, because she (in the eyes of other black authors) failed to present the world as they did (= exaggerated picture)
- ☼ she didn't want to present her people as victims of their own race
- ☼ she died in poverty, after her death she was discovered by **Alice Walker** (The Colour Purple), a contemporary writer
- ☼ she published the main part of her literature in the 1930's, during the time of the great depression
- ☼ she wasn't interested in the racist issues (she thought they were already overdone)

- ☼ she began publishing after the vogue of the kind of literature the H.R. authors wrote was already over – that's why she was unpopular (and also because she didn't portray her people only as victims)
- ☼ A. Walker re-established Z.N.H. and also found her unmarked grave and put a tombstone on it
- ☼ Z.N.H. is an important predecessor of the contemporary female authors
- ☼ **works:**
 - Spunk (Opportunity Magazine), 1925
 - Jonah's Gourd Vine, 1934 – 1st novel
 - Mules and Men, 1935
 - Their Eyes were Watching God, 1937
 - Dust Tracks on a Road, 1942 (1st person autobiography)

☼ **THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD**

- ☼ Janie Crawford (the protagonist) tells her story to a friend
- ☼ she was raised by her grandma Nanny
- ☼ J. had to work hard and was abused sexually by her master and also his wife who released her anger on J. instead on her husband
- ☼ Nanny had high hopes for Janie; J. could play with the white children of Nanny's masters – Nanny shielded J. from the pain of black people, but at the same time prevented J. from being a part of the black society which could protect her in a way
- ☼ Nanny: "the nigger woman is the mule of the world" – the white man throws down his load for the black man to pick it up; he, in turn, just passes the load to his "mule", he doesn't carry it himself
- ☼ Nanny was afraid that J. would end up as her mother did (raped by a school teacher, abused)
- ☼ Nanny found Logan Killicks who was fairly rich and thought he could save J. from poverty – they got married, but J. didn't love him; when he realised that, he threatened her that he'll send her to work in the field, that he'll make her a mule
- ☼ J. didn't want that, so she ran away – on the way she met Joe Starks who eventually became a mayor of Eatonville; he could provide J. with the "front porch existence"
- ☼ J. still had to help in his store and as time went by, she realised that she was just her husband's possession, she had to do what he wanted
- ☼ "somebody got to think for women, children, chickens and cows" – Joe Stark's words
- ☼ one day, Janie had enough and humiliated him by publicly questioning his manhood
- ☼ J.S. died and left all his property to Janie, who became very rich this way
- ☼ she later married Vergible Woods, Tea Cake
- ☼ they left her property and went on the road together – they were equals and very happy
- ☼ due to fate, their happiness was very short lived (a hurricane struck the area they worked in, Tea Cake saved Janie's life; after the hurricane, they helped remove the destroyed houses and bury the dead and Tea Cake was bitten by a rabid dog)
- ☼ T.C. fell ill (2nd faze – 1st the aggressive phase, 2nd the lethargic phase); in the 1st phase, T.C. tried to kill Janie but she killed him in self-defence (she was prosecuted but acquitted by an all-white jury)
- ☼ at the end, she is back on her estate in Eatonville and narrated her story
- ☼ Eatonville has an important role in the novel – it was an all-black city, the people there were proud and there was no really hard poverty – this community accepted Janie
- ☼ Eatonville is mainly presented through dialogues in uncensored black dialect; standard English is used only in the author's comments
- ☼ a story about a mule – it was treated badly by its owner and consequently turned mean; the owner wanted to kill it, but Janie persuaded Joe to buy it so that it could die peacefully of old age; when it dies, the citizens prepare a funeral; Janie is not allowed to go because she is the mayor's wife and instead she has to stay behind and take care of the store; she resents her husband for preventing her to go
- ☼ the men in Eatonville are all sexist, they view women just as their possessions
- ☼ the life in Eatonville is black, there were no whites to interfere
- ☼ the narrator makes a distinction between the inside and the outside of Janie's marriage – on the outside they look happy, but in reality they're not
- ☼ **themes:**
 - **slavery** (Nanny is an ex-slave; she began, figuratively speaking, a slave of her own misconception – she thought that a black woman couldn't live on her own, she has to

be someone's "mule"; she cannot help this misconception because her life was like that, but she wants to prevent Janie from slipping into this role of a "mule")

- **freedom** (it takes Janie 3 marriages to realise what freedom really is; freedom is symbolised by the blue horizon); in her 1st marriage she was naïve and young, she thought that love will come of its own accord – they are married but very lonely because they don't belong to each other; when she meets Joe she is very hopeful because he is very nice at first but when they get married she realises it was all just a show to win her over, he treats her badly; Tea Cake is younger than Janie, treats her as his equal, respectfully (when they first meet, they talked and he taught her to play checkers; she was stunned because before Joe always told her that she was too stupid to play and that it was no business for a woman to play games, she had to work
- ⊗ at the end she says that she's done living grandma's way and that she wants to live her own way – but she understands her grandma and doesn't reproach her (she thought a "front-porch existence" was the best, but Janie realised it was empty and boring
- ⊗ Janie realises that the aim of reaching a higher position makes people forget those below them and gives rise to all kinds of discrimination (ex. Joe never bothers to think about whether the woman who begged him for a piece of meat is really hungry, he just makes fun of her)
- ⊗ Janie + Tea Cake = real love, not material
- ⊗ Tea Cake helps Janie to understand and forgive
- ⊗ racism is not a major issue in the novel, but there are some examples of it