AMERICAN LITERATURE

1. The Colonial Period (1492–1700)

Native Americans, the first inhabitants of the continent, did not develop anything we can call "literature" – their stories and poems were spread orally, which means the American literally history begins with the age of **colonialism**.

The character of early American literature is strongly influenced by several factors:

- It was the era of **colonising the continent**. Since not only the **English** explored and claimed the territories, the beginnings of American literature are more or less connected also with **French**, **Spanish** or **Dutch** literatures as well.
- The first writers brought mainly **English ideas and ways of writing**, which means early American literature is based on the literature of England. As years passed and literary theory developed, the writers who adopted the English style are now sometimes called **pale faces** (Franklin, Longfellow, James, Pound). Their poetry is sometimes referred to as "cooked poetry". On the other hand, there were authors who explored new topics and helped shape America's own literary tradition. Those are called **redskins** (Whitman, Emerson, the Beat Generation). Their poetry is referred to as "raw poetry".
- Religion played an important part in the writers' lives. Many writings of the period were sermons² and theological books. The fact that the Pilgrims landed in the Massachusetts Bay in 1620 had an immense³ influence on the culture of the newly developing colonial system.
- The topics common in the early periods were connected with the issues of living in a
 new land (agriculture, explorations, and relations with the native people) and travelling
 (travel logs⁴, journals).

JOHN SMITH (1580–1631) is considered to be the first American writer. He was an explorer and colonist; he helped found Jamestown in 1607. His *A True Relation of Virginia* is said to be the first American book written in English. It describes the problems of colonising the area. **WILLIAM BRADFORD** (1590–1657) was a Puritan writer who described life in the early English settlements. His book *Of Plymouth Plantation* is full of religious topics and depictions⁶ of a difficult life in the colony.

shape – utvořit

sermon – kázání

immense – nesmírný

⁴ travel log – cestovní deník

John Smith is connected with the character of Pocahontas, an Indian woman who saved his life after he had been captured.

⁶ depiction – popis

ANNE BRADSTREET (1612–1672) wrote lyrical, religious and personal poetry. She is the author of To My Dear and Loving Husband. MARY ROWLANDSON (1637–1711) gives us the image of a woman's life in the colonial period. Her A Narrative of the Captivity and **Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson** tells her story of being kidnapped by Native Americans. The book became a bestseller.

2. The Revolutionary Period (1700–1800)

As dissatisfaction with the colonial system and the relations with Britain grew, the literature gradually changed its shape. The writers became more politically, anti-British and revolutionary oriented, rationalism and enlightenment prevailed. Essays, speeches and pamphlets became more important, the Puritans' religious poetry fell out of favour⁷ as man was not considered naturally sinful any longer.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN (1706–1790) is one of the most important figures of the period. He can be described as what we call a "renaissance man" – a person of many skills. He was a politician, scientist, philosopher, publisher, humourist, inventor and writer. The Way to Wealth gives the reader advice how to become successful – hard work and common sense are very important. Autobiography – Franklin writes about his life, his successes and failures, individualism. His style is very plain. It is one of the first depictions of the American dream.

THOMAS PAINE (1737–1809) was an English-born essayist and pamphleteer. His pamphlet "Common Sense" is a sharp critique of the colonial system and explains why the Americans should rise against the English. JOHN HECTOR ST. JOHN (1735–1813) was a French-American writer, one of the fathers of the American novel. His epistolary novel Letters from an American Farmer deals with the differences between life in Europe and in America.

THOMAS JEFFERSON (1743–1826) was an architect, essayist, lawyer, politician, and later became the 3rd President of the United States of America. His greatest contribution⁸ to the history of America is that he is the main author of the **Declaration of Independence**, which was adopted by the Continental Congress on 4th July 1776 during the War of Independence. For illustration, read the final section of the Declaration:

We, therefore⁹, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled¹⁰, appealing¹¹ to the Supreme Judge¹² of the world for the rectitude¹³ of our intentions, do, in the Name, and

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fall out of favour – ztratit oblibu

contribution – příspěvek

therefore - tudíž

¹⁰ assembled – shromážděný

appeal – odvolávat se

¹² the Supreme Judge – Nejvyšší Soudce (Bůh)

¹³ rectitude – čistota

by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly¹⁴ publish and declare, That these united Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved¹⁵ from all Allegiance¹⁶ to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved¹⁷; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy¹⁸ War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm¹⁹ reliance²⁰ on the protection of divine²¹ Providence²², we mutually²³ pledge²⁴ to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.

3. The Period of Romanticism and Transcendentalism (1800–1880)

The period of romanticism represented a **revolt against classicism** and its values such as reason and form. The American variant of romanticism was different from the European one to a certain degree²⁵. There was a great **interest in Indians** and their culture. The writings were less political and religious, the topics were **mostly American**, and the writers stressed imagination, nature and individualism.

The Knickerbockers were a group of romantic writers who contributed to The Knickerbocker, a magazine published in New York. They named themselves after WASHINGTON IRVING's (1783–1859) *A History of New York, by Diedrich Knickerbocker*. Irving was America's first professional writer and the founder of short story in the USA, "Rip Van Winkle" being one of his most famous short stories. It follows a henpecked²⁶ husband who falls asleep in a forest and wakes up many years later after the colonies have become an independent country. "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" is about a headless knight who terrorises the inhabitants of a settlement.

JAMES FENIMORE COOPER (1789–1851) was interested in life in wilderness and among the native inhabitants. He wrote a series of five novels, together called the *Leatherstocking Tales*. They concentrate on Natty Bumppo, a white man living in the forests of New York, and his friend Chingachgook, a Mohican chief. There are five books in the series: *The Deerslayer*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, *The Pathfinder*, *The Pioneers* and *The Prairie*.

EDGAR ALLAN POE (1809–49) is one of the most important figures of the American literary tradition. His life was filled with sorrow and suffering. After unsuccessful studies he

¹⁴ solemnly – s vážností

¹⁵ absolved – vyjmut

¹⁶ allegiance – oddanost

¹⁷ dissolve – rozpustit

¹⁸ levy – vyhlásit

¹⁹ firm – pevný

²⁰ reliance – spolehnutí

²¹ divine – božský

²² Providence – Prozřetelnost

²³ mutually – vzájemně

²⁴ pledge – přísahat

to a certain degree – do jisté míry

henpecked – pod pantoflem

became an editor. He drank alcohol and misfortune had a notable impact on his work. His writings are gloomy and bizarre; his characters are murderers, alcoholics, desperate lovers and tortured prisoners. Poe is the founder of modern American horror story and detective story. His short stories often describe the darkest states of human mind and mysteries solved by logic. The most famous short stories by Poe include: "The Tell-Tale Heart", "The Black Cat", "The Pit and the Pendulum", "The Mask of the Red Death" or "The Gold-Bug". He is not less famous for his melancholic poems such as "Annabel Lee", "Eldorado" or "The Raven", which expresses the idea of vanity²⁷ through the eyes of a man asking a mysterious raven about his dead love while the raven's only answer is "nevermore":

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting	Pak se klidně ulebedí, stále sedí, stále sedí
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;	jako ďábel na bělostných ňadrech Pallas Athéné;
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming	oči v snění přimhouřeny na pozadí bílé stěny,
And the lamplight o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor	lampa vrhá beze změny jeho stín, jímž uhrane,
And my soul from out that shadow that he's floating on the floor	a má duše z toho stínu, jímž mne navždy uhrane,
Shall be lifted – nevermore.	nevzchopí se – víckrát ne.

Transcendentalism is a movement of authors concentrated in Boston. They rejected the then-common spirituality and materialism. They were **inspired by nature, spent time alone and relied on themselves**. They also stressed the role of intuition and God was omnipresent²⁸ for them.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON (1803–82) is the author of "The Nature" – an essay expressing Transcendentalist ideas. His friend **HENRY DAVID THOREAU** (1817–1862) wrote *Walden*, a philosophical book about his new birth near Walden Lake, where he spent two years alone.

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE (1804–63) wrote *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), one of the most famous and important books in the American literary history. It tells the tale of Hester Prynn, a woman who is sentenced to wearing the letter A on her clothes (A for "adultery²⁹"). She lives with her daughter Pearl and evolves into a strong character. The book criticises Puritan morals, prejudice³⁰ and intolerance.

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW (1817–82) is known for his romantic poems

²⁸ omnipresent – všudypřítomný

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 $^{^{27}}$ vanity – marnost

²⁹ adultery – cizoložství

³⁰ prejudice – předsudek

written in simple language. He wrote "The Song of Hiawatha", a poem about the Indian chief Hiawatha inspired by the Finnish epic *Kalevala*. WALT WHITMAN (1819–92) is considered as one of the best American poets of all time. He introduced free verse – no metrical pattern and no rhymes appear in his poems. This influenced many poets to come – the Chicago Renaissance or the Beat Generation. *Leaves of Grass* (1855) is a collection of poems where he compares freedom to grass – it should grow everywhere. "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" is a long poem about the death of Abraham Lincoln. EMILY DICKINSON (1830–86) is another poet considered as one of the greatest in American history. She rarely left her house, her poems were scarcely published during her life, they are personal and lyrical. They do not have any titles.

HERMAN MELVILLE (1819–91) spent a part of his life at sea. *Moby-Dick* is a long novel about a young sailor called Ishmael, who joins the crew of the Pequod, a ship under the command of captain Ahab, who is trying to hunt a giant whale which once bit off his leg. The clash³¹ between Ahab and Moby-Dick is the allegory of man's struggle against nature.

4. American Realism and Naturalism (1860–1930)

Just as in Europe, the period of romanticism was followed by the period of realism. Writers left behind the styles and topics adopted by the previous generation and rather concentrated on **describing life as it was with its negatives** typical for the period. It was the era of **industrialisation and migration**, determinism was a major paradigm³² of the age. Regionalism also appeared (Local Color School – a group of authors who described the customs and specifics of particular regions). **Novel** was the main genre.

MARK TWAIN (1835–1910), born Samuel Langhorne Clemens, was a great American novelist, short story writer and humourist. He was a member of the Local Color School. He spent a major part of his life on the Mississippi as a boatman, which plays an important part in his writings. His most famous novels are probably *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*³³, a book describing the life of a problem boy, and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), which concentrates on Tom Sawyer's friend Huck, who assists a black slave on his journey. The book criticises slavery and tries to describe the world through the eyes of a naïve, uncivilised, yet honest boy. *The Prince and the Pauper* tells the story of a poor boy called Tom Canty who changes places with Prince Edward, Henry VIII's son. The book brought a sharp critique of England's feudal system in the 16th century and people spoilt by their properties. *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* is a satirical novel which follows a young American engineer

³² paradigm – paradigma, soubor pohledů

³¹ clash – souboj

³³ A Czech film adaptation called *Páni kluci* was made in the 1970s.

who bumps his head and wakes up in Arthurian England in the 6th century. He is shocked by the conditions people live in and tries to improve them. The book is full of both funny and depressing moments.

Byl to nejroztodivnější a nejprostší a nejlehkověrnější nárůdek; jedním slovem řečeno, byli to vyložení jelimánci. Pro člověka, narozeného ve zdravém ovzduší svobody, bylo bolestné slyšet jejich ponížené a srdečné výlevy pokory vůči králi a církvi a šlechtě; jako kdyby měli více důvodů, proč milovat a ctít krále a šlechtu, než kolik důvodů má otrok, aby miloval a ctil důtky, nebo pes, aby miloval a ctil cizince, který ho kope! Vždyť, lidičky, každý druh královlády, ať je uzpůsoben jakkolvěk, vždyť každý druh aristokracie, ať je roubována jakkolvěk, je ve skutečnosti pohana; ale narodil-li jste se a vyrostl jste ve světě takhle uspořádaném, patrně sám na to nikdy nepřijdete; a neuvěříte tomu, řekne-li vám to někdo jiný. Člověk se musí stydět za svou lidskou rasu, uvědomí-li si, jaký brak povždy zaujímal trůny lidstva bez stínu oprávnění, beze stopy rozumového důvodu, a vzpomene-li si na druhořadé, ba sedmiřadé lidi, kteří vždycky vystupují jako šlechta národa; byl to čistý spolek monarchů a aristokratů, kteří by se zpravidla byli dodělali jen bídy a zapomnění, kdyby byli přenecháni sobě samotným a kdyby – jako ostatní, mnohem lepší lidé – byli odkázáni na vlastní práci.

HARRIET BEECHER-STOWE (1811–96) is another of the socially critical writers of the period – she is the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, where she fought against slavery. **HENRY JAMES** (1843–1916)³⁴, who became a British citizen, wrote psychological novels and compared different cultures. His most famous works include What Maisie Knew (a novel about an unloved child), The Turn of the Screw (a ghost story novella) or Daisy Miller.

The 1890s saw the rise of **naturalism**, an extreme form of realism coined³⁵ by Émile Zola. Writers portrayed people in extreme situations and described their real behaviour – their books are full of dirty environments, poor neighbourhoods, prostitutes, drunks, crime and illiteracy. They formed a group called the Muckrakers³⁶.

STEPHEN CRANE (1871–1900) wrote *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* about a New York prostitute, and *The Red Badge of Courage* about a naïve soldier's experience in the Civil war.³⁷ **JACK LONDON** (1876–1916) is famous for his books taking place in Alaska during the Gold Rush³⁸ – he is the author of *White Fang* or *The Call of the Wild*, a novel about a dog whose master is killed by Indians and which becomes the leader of a wolf pack³⁹. **THEODORE DREISER** (1871–1945) wrote *Sister Carrie* and *An American Tragedy* (1925), which is a critique of the idea of the American dream. Its hero, Clyde Griffiths, pursues his dream of becoming rich and important. When he has a chance to marry a rich girl, he murders his girlfriend, is found guilty and dies in an electric chair. UPTON SINCLAIR's (1878–1968) best known book is *The Jungle* – it is a story of immigrants from Poland and Lithuania living in Chicago and working in terrible conditions in a slaughterhouse⁴⁰.

muckraker – kydač hnoje

³⁴ His brother William is one of the founders of psychology.

³⁵ coin – vytvořit

The 2008 Czech film *Tobruk* is a free adaptation of *The Red Badge of Courage*.

the Gold Rush – zlatá horečka

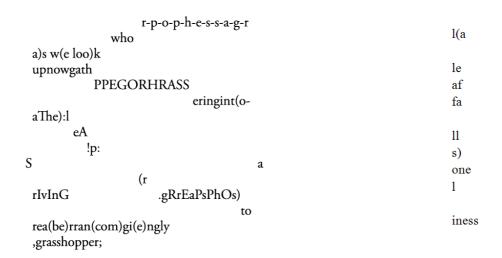
pack – smečka

slaughterhouse – jatka

5. American Modernism and the Literature of the First Half of the 20th Century

Since the dawn of the 20th century, writers were looking for **new ways of writing and new topics**. Their writings expressed their feelings **about living in the modern age**, some of them wrote positively, some negatively. Their style became more complicated, experiments were quite common. Many movements appeared; together they might be called "**modernism**".

EZRA POUND (1885–1972) was one of the most influential poets of the 20th century. He was born in the USA but he spent a long time in Europe, he also spoke many languages. He is one of the most complex writers in the American history. He was involved in pioneering new styles and movements – imagism (words provoke pictures in the reader's mind) or vorticism. His most important work is called *Cantos*. **T. S. ELIOT** (1888–1965) lived in Britain and wrote **"The Waste Land"**, a very complicated modernist poem. **E. E. CUMMINGS** (1894–1962) was an experimental poet. His poems often played with form:



The **Chicago Renaissance** was a movement consisting of Illinois poets. **CARL SANDBURG** (1878–1967) was optimistic about America's future; he expressed his passion for the rhythm of a modern city in his *Chicago Poems*.

The Lost Generation is a term invented by Gertrude Stein to refer to a group of writers who felt alienated⁴¹ to the world. They wrote about young people who do not find any pleasure in everyday life or becoming rich. The group included Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Gertrude Stein, John Dos Passos and William Faulkner. **ERNEST HEMINGWAY** (1899–1961) is probably the most famous representative. His writing style is very plain, however, his stories

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⁴¹ alienated – odcizený

and novels are sometimes compared to an iceberg (you only see its one eighth; the rest is hidden below the surface). His novelette *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952) earned him the Nobel Prize for literature⁴². It shows the struggle between a fisher-man called Santiago and the natural world.

He is a great fish and I must convince⁴³ him, he thought. I must never let him learn his strength nor⁴⁴ what he could do if he made his run⁴⁵. If I were him I would put in everything⁴⁶ now and go until something broke. But, thank God, they are not as intelligent as we who kill them; although they are more noble and more able.

The old man had seen many great fish. He had seen many that weighed more than a thousand pounds and he had caught two of that size in his life, but never alone. Now alone, and out of sight of land, he was fast to the biggest fish that he had ever seen and bigger than he had ever heard of, and his left hand was still as tight as the gripped claws of an eagle⁴⁷.

The moral of the story can be summed up as "a man can be destroyed, but not defeated". *The Sun Also Rises* is about a group of young people who drink, have love affairs and attend bullfights, all these without any mental satisfaction. *A Farewell to Arms* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* are Hemingway's accounts of war in Europe.

F. SCOTT FITZGERALD (1896–1940) is well known for *The Great Gatsby* (1925). It is a short novel about Nick Carraway, who meets a mysterious rich man named Jay Gatsby. Gatsby spends time throwing lavish⁴⁸ parties; however, this does not make him feel happy. The book shows the negative aspects of high society in the roaring twenties. "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button" is a short story about a man suffering from reverse ageing. WILLIAM FAULKNER (1897–1962) is one of the most important writers of the American South. He situated his writings in the fictional Yoknapatawpha County in Mississippi. In his books, he concentrates on the fall of the Southern aristocracy. His texts are often very demanding, the reader does not know who says what. He wrote *The Sound and the Fury, Light in August* or *Absalom, Absalom!*.

SINCLAIR LEWIS (1885–1951) was a satirist from the American Midwest. He is the first American writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. His best novel is *Babbitt*, which tells the story of a typical middle class man. JOHN STEINBECK (1902–68) is one of the best known socially critical writers of all time. His style is very realistic, he wrote about exploited⁴⁹ people who fall to the bottom of the society. *Of Mice and Men* is a novel about two homeless farm workers. *The Grapes of Wrath* is probably his most famous novel; it is the story of the Joad

⁴⁵ make one's run – vyrazit k útěku

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Eleven American authors (twelve including T. S. Eliot, who lived in Britain) have been awarded the Nobel Prize so far: Sinclair Lewis (1930), Eugene O'Neill (1936), Pearl S. Buck (1938), William Faulkner (1949), Ernest Hemingway (1954), John Steinbeck (1962), Saul Bellow (1976), Isaac Bashevis Singer (1978), Czesław Miłosz (1980), Joseph Brodsky (1987), Toni Morrison (1993).

⁴³ convince – udolat

⁴⁴ nor – ani

⁴⁶ put in everything – vynaložit všechnu sílu

gripped claws of an eagle – zaťatý orlí spár

⁴⁸ lavish – okázalý

⁴⁹ exploited – vykořisť ovaný

family moving from Oklahoma to California to work there on fruit farms in terrible conditions. *East of Eden* is another of his great works.

6. American Literature in the 2nd Half of the 20th Century and Contemporary American Literature

The authors of the 2nd half of the 20th century followed in the tradition developed by their predecessors. **More movements appeared** (the Beat Generation, Hippies), **ethnic writers** (African-American, Asian, Native American, Jewish) **became more involved** and some of the authors may be called "post-modernist". New topics became popular (**the revolt against the system**, **ethnic and racial issues**, **the holocaust**), new genres flourished (**comic books**, **fantasy novels**, **sci-fi**, **horror stories**). American drama was going through its best times.

J.D. SALINGER (1919–2010) wrote *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), a short novel about a young man leaving his university studies, disgusted with people around him.

V tomhle směru to byl hrozně divnej kluk. Například si ze mě pořád utahoval – jako kvůli těm kufrům. V jednom kuse mě krmil s tím, že jsou moc nový a buržoustský. Což byl jeho nejoblíbenější výraz. Někde to čet nebo to někde slyšel. Všechno, co jsem měl, bylo pekelně buržoustský. Od rána do večera si ho ode mě půjčoval, ale přes to přese všechno bylo buržoustský. Bydleli jsme spolu jenom asi dva měsíce. Načež jsme oba požádali, aby nás rozstěhovali. Ale legrační na tom bylo, že když jsme se přestěhovali, tak mi tak nějak chyběl, poněvadž měl senzační smysl pro humor a někdy jsme spolu užili moc legrace. Vůbec by mě nepřekvapilo, kdybych mu byl taky chyběl. Ze začátku si jen tak dělal psinu, když říkal, že moje věci jsou buržoustský, a mně to bylo úplně fuk – ona to legrace taky byla, fakt. Načež po nějaký době bylo vidět, že si už legraci nedělá. Ono je vážně těžký bydlet s lidma, když máte kufry mnohem lepší než o ni – když vaše jsou doopravdy kvalitní a jejich ne. Myslíte si, že když je někdo inteligentní – jako ta druhá osoba – a má smysl pro humor, tak je mu úplně fuk, čí kufry jsou lepší. Jenže ono vám mu to není fuk! Vážně.

WILLIAM STYRON (1925–2006) was a southern writer who is best known for *Sophie's Choice* (1979). It is the story of a young Southerner Stingo who befriends a Polish immigrant Sophie and her paranoid lover Nathan. Sophie tells him her story of having to choose between sacrificing one or the other child in a concentration camp during WWII.

Doktor trochu vrávoral. Naklonil se na okamžik k nějakému svému vojenskému poskokovi, který v ruce držel podložku s lejstry, a něco mu šeptal, zatímco se soustředěně dloubal v nose. Eva se prudce přitiskla k Sophii a rozplakala se. "Takže ty věříš v Krista spasitele?" řekl jí doktor těžkým hlasem, ale hlasem podivně věcným, jako přednášející, který zkoumá poněkud nejasný aspekt nějakého logického axiomatu. Pak pronesl cosi, co ji na okamžik dokonale mystifikovalo: "Copak neřekl "Nechte maličkých přijíti ke mně'?" Otočil se k ní zády, s úpornými trhavými pohyby opilce.

Sophie, zajíkající se hrůzou, užuž měla na jazyku nějakou tupou odpověď, když jí doktor řekl: "Smíš si nechat jedno děcko."

- "Bitte?" vyjekla Sophie.
- "Smíš si nechat jedno děcko," opakoval. "Druhé půjde pryč. Které si chceš nechat?"
- "Chcete říct, že si musím sama zvolit?"
- "Jseš Polka, nejsi židovka. Máš výsadu máš volbu."

Jakékoliv uvažování jako by v ní ustrnulo, přestalo. Pak cítila, jak se pod ní podlomila kolena. "Já nemůžu volit! Já přece nemůžu volit!" začala křičet. Dobře se pamatovala, jak se tehdy rozkřičela! Ani mučení andělé nekřičeli tak hlasitě do lomozu pekelných muk. "*Ich kann nicht wählen*!" vykřikla.

Doktor si uvědomil, že výstup vzbuzuje nežádoucí pozornost. "Neřvi!" poručil jí. "Dělej a řekni, jak ses rozhodla. Vyber jedno, krucihiml, anebo tam pošlu obě. A dělej!"

As for authors writing about war, **NORMAN MAILER** (1923–2007) is best known for his novel *The Naked and the Dead* (1948), which takes place during WWII in the Pacific. **JOSEPH HELLER** (1923–99) wrote *Catch-22*, a war novel taking place in the Mediterranean⁵⁰. A group of pilots is added new and new flights to their schedule instead of being laid off.

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS (1914–83) wrote psychological plays. He is the author of *A Cat* on a Hot Tin Roof or A Streetcar Named Desire. The latter is the tragedy of a woman raped by her brother-in-law. It is one of the most quoted American plays ever written. ARTHUR MILLER (1915–2005) wrote Death of a Salesman, the tragedy of a disappointed ageing man who commits suicide to ensure his family money from his life insurance. Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? by EDWARD ALBEE (1928) is another famous drama of the period.

In the 1950s, a group of non-conformist authors emerged, which is now known as the **Beat Generation**. They refused to fit in the society, revolted against the establishment, experimented with drugs and criticised consumerism. They preferred spontaneity and travelling, San Francisco became their centre. Their literature is still popular and inspirational for many young people. **JACK KEROUAC** (1922–69) wrote *On the Road*, which became a kind of a Bible for his followers. It tells stories of people travelling across America. **LAWRENCE FERLINGHETTI** (1919) is the best known poet of the generation, together with **ALLEN GINSBERG** (1926–1997), who wrote "**Howl**", a poem expressing the beatniks' attitudes:

Viděl jsem nejlepší hlavy své generace zničené šílenstvím, hystericky obnažené a o hladu,

vlekoucí se za svítání černošskými ulicemi a vztekle shánějící dávku drogy,

hipstery s andělskými hlavami, celé žhavé po prastarém nebeském kontaktu s hvězdným dynamem ve strojovně noci,

kteří v bídě a v hadrech a se zapadlýma očima a podnapilí vysedávali a kouřili v nadpřirozené temnotě bytů se studenou vodou, vznášeli se přitom nad vrcholky velkoměst a kontemplovali o džezu,

kteří odhalili mozky Nebesům nad nadzemní dráhou a spatřili mohamedánské anděly, jak se potácejí prozřelí po střechách činžáků,

kteří procházeli univerzitami se zářivýma studenýma očima, měli halucinace o Arkansasu a tragédii Blakeova světla mezi válečnými vědátory,

které vyloučili z akademií pro bláznovství & publikaci obscénní ódy na oknech lebky,

kteří křehli zimou v neholených pokojích ve spodním prádle, pálili peníze v koších na odpadky a naslouchali přes zeď Hrůze,...

CHARLES BUKOWSKI (1920–94) is well known for his poems and stories full of sex, alcohol and drugs. KEN KESEY (1935–2001) is the author of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, a novel taking place in a mental asylum whose patients rebel against the oppressing system represented by nurse Ratched. TRUMAN CAPOTE (1924–84) was a post-modernist writer who combined fiction and non-fiction (e.g. *In Cold Blood*).

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⁵⁰ the Mediterranean – Středozemí

African-American literature became more prominent as the struggle for human rights intensified. They followed the so called **Harlem Renaissance**, a movement of black writers (e.g. the poet Langston Hughes) from the 1920s. **JAMES BALDWIN** (1924–87) was an essayist and novelist writing not only about black people's problems, but also about homosexuals' problems. **TONI MORRISON** (1931) is famous for her novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970) about a black girl who is raped by her father and becomes pregnant with him. The book criticises black girls' pursuit of the ideal of beauty embodied⁵¹ by white girls.

Jewish American literature draws inspiration from the painful experience of the holocaust, but also from the Jewish spirit, traditions and humour. The main hero is often an unlucky outsider. ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER (1902–91) wrote *Gimpel the Fool*, the story of an unlucky man who has five children without sleeping with his wife. BERNARD MALAMUD (1914–86) is the author of *The Fixer*, a book about Jews experiencing anti-Semitism in Ukraine. PHILIP ROTH (1933) was accused of being anti-Semitic even though he is Jewish. He wrote *Portnoy's Complaint*, a book about a boy spied by his mother.

N. SCOTT MOMADAY (1934) is probably the best known **Native American** writer. He wrote *The House Made of Dawn*, a non-linear novel about an Indian man who belongs neither to his tribe nor to the majority. **Asian-American** (John Okada, Maxine Hong Kingston) and **Latin-American** (Sandra Cisneros) writers also appeared.

New genres have become more popular in the past decades. As for sci-fi, PHILIP K. DICK (1928–82) and RAY BRADBURY (1920–2012) are worth mentioning. The former is the author of dystopian novels *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *A Scanner Darkly*, the latter wrote many short stories and the novel *Fahrenheit 451* about a society where books are banned and burnt. GEORGE R.R. MARTIN (1948) is the author of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, a series of fantasy books beginning with the bestselling *A Game of Thrones*. STEPHEN KING (1947) is the example of modern horror fiction – his books *The Dreamcatcher*, *Carrie*, 'Salem's Lot, It, Misery or The Dark Tower became hits. Teen fiction has become very popular in the past few years, The Maze Runner by JAMES DASHNER (1972) being an example of a contemporary bestseller.

Thanks to Š.J.

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⁵¹ embody – ztělesňovat