American Literature between the Wars 1914-1945

Key words: World War I, World War II, the Great Depression, modernism, Harlem Renaissance

I. Life and Thought between the Wars

1. WWI, a crucial stage in the nation’s evolution to a world power
2. The phonograph record, record player, motion picture, radio → mass or popular culture
3. Automobile: the most powerful technological influence
4. 1929: The Great Depression
   1) 1920s: social, personal
      --concerns of personal freedom, pursuit of pleasure, etc.
      --belief in the work ethic, social conformity, etc.
      --relaxation of sexual mores
      --female suffrage
      --growth of modern science
      --loss of authority for traditional, humanistic explanations of the real world and human life
      --Sigmund Freud; Karl Marx
   2) 1930s: economical, political
      --fascist dictatorship
      --the Communist party

II. Literature and the Times

1. >WWI: faith in society and in art
2. WWI< □ <WWII: faith in art
3. >WWII: loss of faith, even faith in self

III. Modernism

1. Major artistic movement responding to the sense of social breakdown in the early 20th century
2. International movement shared by many art forms
3. Characteristic: fragments
4. Subject matter: search for meaning → poem or literary work itself
5. Content: subjectivity
6. Attack traditional literature, but in turn attacked by popular literature

IV. Traditionalism

1. Expatriates
2. Integrated with American subject matter
3. Regional literature in the South
   1) Southern Agrarians vs. urban North
4. Black Americans
   1) Harlem Renaissance: African-American artists in many media to develop a strong cultural presence
5. Women writers

V. Prose, Poetry, and Politics

1. Art for art’s sake vs. public service

VI. American Drama in the 20th Century

1. Broadway □ Off-Broadway □ Off-off-Broadway
2. Eugene O’Neil