

The Rise of the 20th Century American Novel in the Inter-War Phase

Abdelkader Nebbou

Faculty of Letters and Languages, Department of English
University of Tahri Mohamed Béchar, Algeria

Abstract

One cannot talk about the twentieth century American literature without referring back to some of the important issues that took place formerly in the second half of the nineteenth century. Consequently, most of the scholars and critics of American literature agree that the twentieth century American literature – “twentieth-century renaissance” originated in the previous century (Sculley, 1999, p. 12). Invocations of a great American novel began in the early nineteenth century during the period of “literary nationalism” between the middle of the century, and the turn of the nineteenth century into the twentieth (Thompson, 2012, p. 17). Basically, one can consider the period from the turn of the 19th century up till the end of the Second World War (WWII) as the time when the American literature reached its peak (Sculley, p. 906). The First World War (WWI) that constituted a broadcasting experience for many writers engendered the war novel. Moreover, the world depression in 1929 and its consequences in the 1930s grouped young American writers to express their malaise and feeling of their anxiety of the currents, by exploring the spiritual nature of man and the value of the American society and institutions. This paper investigates the circumstances that developed the American novel from being a mere reproduction of world works to become a novel reflecting the American authors’ maturity and enriching the world literatures with works of an American touch.

Keywords: American expatriate writers, inter-war period, moral standards, social novel, war novel

Introduction

The Civil War that resulted in one American nation; the urban industrialisation that had increased materialism, and moral corruption that led to the disillusionment of many writers made basis for the would be twentieth American novel. Moreover, the American intervention in the First World War and the great world depression of 1929 caused many emerging young writers at the time to revolt against the situation and to depict the Americans' nightmare, just after they had been dreaming of a brightened future along the century.

The Post Civil War period

When the war ended by the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 a new phase came to substitute for the abolitionists' production and the writing of the slavery advocates; the thoughts were diverted to the development of industry, and the social revolt that had started to be obvious in most literary works at the turn of the 19th century and later. However on the eve of the 20th century "the black ebony of business" collapsed traditions and the underlying value systems that had shaped centuries of American life. Traditions were dissolved in the world of materialism.

There was a need for a novel of closely observed detail and considerable social significance. What was written in America was no longer thought to be an imitation of what had been produced other where. After the International Copy-right Law (1891), there were the emergence of mass periodicals with short fiction and a variety of sections depicting life in desperate regions in the country. This situation resulted in the increase of the readers taste in reading more and more about their own districts, landscape, customs and dress.

World masters of realism and naturalism such as Dostoevski, Turgenev, Balzac, Zola, Flaubert, Hardy, Moore, Synge and others inspired the new emerging American writers (Sculley, p. 905). Writers at the turn of the 19th century were deeply influenced by ideas from Darwin's theory of evolution, Nietzsche's attack on Christianity and social studies. The prevailing thought was to reconsider traditional social morality. Individuals were responsible and thus they must choose between good and evil no matter what outside forces governed them. The book of Frank Norris *The Octopus* (1901) where the battle is between California wheat farmers and the Southern Pacific Railroad – the conflict is between the farmers impersonating the power of nature against the railroad company standing for the threat of mechanization – is an example of this social revolt (High, 1986, p. 100). Other books emphasised the idea that humans are helpless in front of the immutable laws of nature; this was quite depicted in Jack London's book *Sea Wolf* where even though Wholf Larsen was a super hero, he could not survive in the sea.

By the end of the 19th century for this new trend of writers including William Dean Howell in his *the Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885), Stephen Crane in his *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893) as well as Hamlin Garland in his social protest book as *Main-Travelled Roads* (1891), the novel had the power to become a political weapon. In reverse to Frank Norris' thought that the individuals are victims to man-made civilization (mechanization), I can list Kate Chopin in her book, *The Awakening* (1899) in which she saw that the blame s upon the society that makes of individuals (females) victims. The novel was about female repression in

the American society. In her trial to break the taboos, the protagonist, Edna left home to run away with her lover Robert. When Edna felt that there was no escape from the overwhelming patriarchal social norms ensnaring women, she attempted to transcend her society's bonds by surrendering to the waters of the Gulf of Mexico (Ruland, 1992, p. 191). The writer presents the society as being oppressive, in need of moral standards. The character Edna, impersonating the author, is separate from others fighting her own frustration. The book was one of the earliest attempts to women emancipation the subject that females did not dare talk about at that time and that had introduced a topic that much ink was spilt on later in the 20th century.

All in all, the latest decades of the 19th century writing paved the way for the 20th Century novel writing, as it gave the go-ahead to what had been "un-expressed to express itself... and to let the repressed to be spoken", i.e., to reveal the truth and to publish information and ideas that were considered as taboo or kept hidden before the "Muckraker era".* The interior or psychological realism was a variant form and fell into disfavor as part of an early twentieth century rebellion against the exaggerating "genteel tradition". Like in John Bunyan's masterpiece *The Pilgrim's Progress* when the author attacked human vice in attempt to correct them through the main character Christian (Bunyan, 1965, p. 140), the American writers challenged to correct graft and corruption in both government and business such as in the works: *The Shame of the Cities* and *History of the Standard Oil Company*, written by Lincoln Steffens and Ida Tarbell respectively in 1901 (Wilson, 2006, p. 485). The following extract is Steffens' accounts American life as a whole to sound for the civic pride of an apparently shameless citizenship:

This is the wail of the typical American citizen. Now the typical American citizen is the business man. The typical business man is a bad citizen; he is busy, he does not neglect, he is busy with politics, oh, very busy and very businesslike. I found him buying boodlers in St. Louis, defending grafters in Minneapolis, originating corruption in Pittsburgh... and beating good government with corruption funds in New York (Steffens, 1904, p. 5).

Development of communications by means the telegraph, camera, newspapers and the radio made a competition with books as sources of amusement and enlightenment. New forms of communication and new modes of transportation made American society increasingly mobile and familiar with many more regions of the country. Literary voices from even the remotest corners could reach a national audience. At the same time, American writers—particularly writers of fiction—began to influence world literature.

The Early 1900s

It is commonly agreed by critics that the early decades of the twentieth century were a turning point in the history of American literature. American literature was no longer a copy of British and European productions. Rather, the American writers started to enrich the world with their literary contributions rich of ideas based on what happened in the writers' native country, America.

The nature of the 20th century American literature was established early before WWI. In this phase of “Renaissance” the emerging generation of the American writers expressed their spiritual problems and disillusionment very sharply, providing the American novel with fresh themes.

Between 1914 and 1939, American literature entered into a phase which is still referred to as the beginnings of modern literature. Starting from 1915 onwards the period is known as the phase of *social criticism* because American writers became preoccupied with what was wrong in their social surroundings. Van Wyck Brooks (1886-1963) was the most influential critic for about twenty years. His early work was the principal factor in the erection of the lofty cultural standards that have encouraged the rise of a mature, serious, philosophical criticism. Brooks’ book, *America's Coming-of-Age* (1915) made of him a spokesman of writers with indifference to leadership by giving courage to other American artists to overstate their disappointment (Cerrito & Dimauro, 1999, p. 152).

Theodore Dreiser (1871-1945) was one of the great American writers to depict the dismal of the urbanized society in favour of common men and women that turn to be its victims. Man is a mechanism and a miserable individual surviving in a social environment that is uncaring and unfeeling. Dreiser’ characters impersonate his pessimism that he could hardly hide in such works as *Sister Carrie* (1900). The world became an unfair universe, controlled by powerful people who did not tolerate any interference on their affairs. Yet in that entire horrible world, man could still stop and ponder — after all humans are all companions in the same sinking ship. Carrie Meeber, the main character in the book sought a better life in Chicago where she became an actress. Unfortunately, she found out that no matter what money and success a person can get in our civilized world; these cannot be keys to true happiness. We can get fame and materialistic things, at the expense of other valuable things such as our pride and social status.

Sherwood Anderson (1876-1941) emerged as influential experimentalist and pessimistic, social critic before 1920. He was taken as a model writer for his easy style and form of fiction by many contemporary young novelists including Hemingway, Faulkner and Wolfe. An example is the early writing of Hemingway—who parodied it cruelly in *Torrents of Spring* (1926) to make a clean break and become his own man. Sherwood’s writing is characterised by its simplicity, much similar to everyday ordinary spoken language (High, p. 120).

Anderson devoted himself to literature and was interested in proletarian fiction by presenting the lives of workingmen. This kind of writing properly springs out of direct experience of proletarian life and might not be available to other writers. Early in his a youth in Clyde, Ohio, he worked as a newsboy, house painter, farmhand, and racetrack helper. After a year, he worked as an advertising writer in Chicago until 1906. Then he tried without success to become a businessman while writing fiction in his spare time. As he was a paint manufacturer in Elyria, Ohio, he suddenly wandered off because he was mentally distraught. His characters grope unsuccessfully to discover the reality in themselves, and with equal frustration they

confront the complexities of the machine age and conventionality in urban life (Sculley, pp. 1186-87).

Anderson did not deny the legitimacy of the writer's concern with emotions, but he wary of 'bogus emotion that a writer may generate by uncritical use of language' (Cunliffe, 1993, pp. 29-32). In fact, his characters express moments of self-understanding. *A Story-Teller's Teller* (1924) is Anderson's autobiography where he explained that "true history of life constitutes rare moments that we live" (p. 309).

The 20th century represented the progressive hopes of the Americans; especially by now, the USA. emerged as a very powerful country as she became the leading industrial nation of the world (Reeves, 2000, p. 3). The products that the United States exchanged with Germany alone in 1913 was valued at nearly two and a half billion dollars; the amount that was twice as great as the entire trade with Europe twenty years before (Lingley, 2006, p. 268).

When Wilson declared that "The world must be made safe for democracy" (Srivastava & Joshi, 2005, p. 188; Lingley, p. 186), it was a preparation of the American nationals to be ready for war. The United States officially entered war on April 6, 1917. Some of 3 million of the convinced civilians were enlisted to the armed forces. American soldiers participated in a grisly and often chaotic drive along a 200-mile front into the region of the Argonne Forest and the Meuse River (Reeves, p. 66). "The most impressive fact about the Americans, as far as the Germans were concerned," historian Edward M. Coffman has written, "was that there were so many of them." The American Expeditionary Force (A.E.F.) suffered 26,277 dead and 95,786 wounded during the fierce fighting. American losses included half a million young American were dead in WWI and 230,074 wounded (Reeves, p. 85).

The Inter-War Novel

Fiction in the post war period oscillates between commentary of social observation and imaginative works from apprehended experience. When Dos Passos became convinced that mechanization debased humans as an indication to his being inspired by the Marxist philosophy, he left for Spain in 1916. In Europe, he worked as a member of French ambulance unit, then with the Italian Red Cross and in the medical corps of the United States Army. As his contemporaries Dos Passos was considered a great 1920s writer reflecting his own experience and expressing his social idealism and disillusionment (Sculley, p. 1579). In *One Man Initiation* (1919) and *Three Soldiers* (1921), the writer moved from subjective view of history to establish a prevailing one with an aesthetic dismay, fear, and hopelessness at war. Much of the trilogy *USA* (1930-36) contains a collage of newspaper headlines, snatches of popular songs, advertisements, and clippings from news and stories. These items constituted implicit commentary on the events they recalled. The following extract concerns the author's agony at the A.E.F. whose troops were sent to guarantee repayment of the Morgan loans to the Allied nations, which Dos Passos believed a powerful cause of American intervention in WWI.

They went over with the A.E.F. to save the Morgan loans, to save the Wilsonian Democracy, they stood at Napoleon's tomb and dreamed empire, they had champagne cocktails at the Ritz bar and slept with Russian countesses in

Montmartre and dreamed empire, all over the country at American legion posts and business men's luncheons it was worth money to make the eagle scream... (Sculley, p. 1583).

Two outstanding authors, Dos Passos and Steinbeck in the variety of their works after the war, *USA* (1930-36) and *Grapes of Wrath* (1939), respectively focussed on those two extremes in American literature when juxtaposing (placing side by side) a fictional narrative with characters of non-fictional nature in a literary form. In Passos' trilogy *USA* and *Newsreel*. According to Sartre, Dos Passos is the author of the authorless novel that abides characterless characters (Ruland, pp. 344- 47).

Another writer that belonged to the "lost generation", is Earnest Hemingway (1899-1961). He is an outstanding figure of the 20th century American literature. As a veteran of WWI, his novels expressed the prevailing view against the war. His idea was that the Americans could no longer claim to be innocent or that their efforts were to seek democracy in the world.

Being influenced by his contemporary writers of the "lost generation" Hemingway wrote simple and short statements. His sentences are a series of balanced statements, very often without adjectives. The nouns are bleak and bare. In his dialogue we read statements as clear polished surfaces whose meanings remain oblique.

Like Sherwood Anderson, he is considered as one of the American expatriate writers in the inter-war phase including Dos Passos, Gertrude Stein, Thomas Wolfe Scott Fitzgerald, and Ezra Pound. These writers were young at the time of the WWI and they experienced the horrors of the machine guns and tankers. Hemingway interpreted the attitudes, the feelings and the troubles of the American soldiers who were enlisted from every pie in America. He was an ambulance driver with the American Field Service in Italy. He translated experience during the war together with its mental effect on American soldiers; some of whom returned home after 1920 but felt they were deceived by their government. In the short story *Soldier's Home*, when the American soldiers who survived the war came home, they could not find it easy to lead a comfortable life among their families, nor could they easily mingle with people. Firstly, from the stories those soldiers recounted, people knew that their compatriot soldiers had not been for a humane mission in Europe. The soldiers confessed they had participated in one of the biggest atrocities the world ever had. About ten million soldiers were dead including Europeans and Americans, let alone European civilians (Reeves, p. 74). Hemingway is a sample of the American expatriate writers who encountered with reality by serving in WWI. Like his "lost generation", he was stricken by the wounds of the war as portrayed in his book *In Our Time* (1925). He found his return to America very hard as American citizens were not easily convinced of their soldiers' participation in the war. Hemingway described the return of a soldier named Harold Krebs home:

By the time Krebs returned to his hometown Oklahoma...People seemed to think it was ridiculous for Krebs to be getting back so late years after the war was over.

Later he felt the need to talk but no one wanted to hear about it. (Hemingway, 1925, pp. 99- 100)

As Hemingway was a great writer, who according to many of his close friend writers: Fitzgerald, Pound and Perkins, he was not the man that would admit being governed by the circumstances. He was not the author that would accept being patronized (Wagner, 2007, p.84). The bitter bewilderment of Hemingway about the American soldiers' wounds and anger when those youth could not figure out what their society wanted of them was further exacerbated by frustration in *The Sun Also Rises* (1926). The writer commented about many of his love affairs in this novel. While lying in hospital, all that remains for the main character, Jake Barnes is only his undefeated body that keeps him long to his previous friendship and love life. *The Sun Also Rises* is another example of modernist works in the 1920s characterized by the collage of the different scenes and events that the author witnessed or experienced. While reading this book, one can find out more and more about Barnes' past life surfing from the fishing scenes, backwards to childhood amongst the native people and friends of the town and country, then recounting of movement about the crowded, smoky, and noisy Montmartre, Pamplona in Spain, the terraces of the Lilas Brett, the Café Aux Amateurs etc... "I figured rapidly back in my mind. It was three days ago that Harvey had won two hundred francs from me shaking poker dice in the New York Bar". "No. When I get like this I don't care whether I eat or not". These memories gave Barnes comfort and contributed to the quick healing of his injury.

I lay awake thinking and my mind jumping around. Then I couldn't keep away from it, and I started to think about Brett and all the rest of it went away. I was thinking about Brett and my mind stopped jumping around and started to go in sort of smooth waves. Then all of a sudden I started to cry. Then after a while it was better and I lay in bed and listened to the heavy trams go by and way down the street, and then I went to sleep. (Hemingway, 1926, p. 31)

The young writers in the inter-war American fiction pay better attention to ordinary reality which, for Hemingway, means to talk of his lived experience in much detail. The shift was conspicuous from dealing with exemplary things, or dramatic things that could be the basis for a lesson, for excitement, for social criticism. To the modern novelist, the focus must be about ordinary things and events, to get more directly at the substance of simple existence, and to highlight modernity's effects on basic human relationships. For modernists in the 1920s, it was important to write fiction more true to daily life, primary feelings, and deep desires. In brief, Hemingway brought about building a narrative full of stirring events and based on historical developments known at first-hand, and at the same to have his personal problems and struggles interpreted by his protagonists. For Underwood (2008), Hemingway's narrative constitutes an indifference towards classical moral values that is imposed by natural currents (p.122). Consequently, his style oscillates precariously between sadism and sentiment, terror and tenderness (Schlager & Lauer, 2001, p.158). Because of Hemingway's easy and direct style, he hardly resorts to symbolism to convey the characters' feelings by showing the facts and the actions that engender emotions (Skipp, 1992, p. 98).

Hemingway was described as one of the great authors, who honestly and undauntedly, reproduces the genuine features of the hard countenance of the age. In his works, *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), the author talks of love, loss, death and survival, as well as the horror of war and its impact on humans. The latter work is acknowledged as a magnificent novel. It is based on real events that tell of an American named Robert Jordan fighting with the Spanish soldiers against Franco's Fascists. The author's experience in Spain and his reports of the war capture the minds of readers while learning of the Spanish Civil War with its fierce cameos of courage, cowardice and passion. Hemingway writes about the Maria's love to Robert and how it grows deeper and deeper because of the horror of the war that draws them and binds them together:

'You came barefoot through the snow?'
 'Yes,' she said and wearing only my wedding shirt,
 He held her close and tight in his arms and she rubbed her head against his chin.
 'Avoid the feet,' she said. 'They are very cold Roberto.'
 'Put them here and warm them.'
 'Nay,' she said. 'They will warm quickly. But say quickly now that you love me.'
 'I love thee.'

(Hemingway, 1941, p. 250)

Another prominent novelist of the twentieth century American literature influenced by Sherwood Anderson is William Faulkner (1897- 1962). Faulkner combined the Southern romance and the modern fiction with sense of experimental form, by merging regional history depicting the social disintegration during the 1920s. While seeking to come to terms with the burdens of the Southern past, Faulkner treated history not just as a collection of factual events, but as an opportunity for reconstructing the past through the power and scope of his imagination (Campbell & Alasdair, 1997, p. 144). Apart from his friendship with Sherwood Anderson, Faulkner kept separate from friends, colleagues and literary circles. According to Ruland (1972), Faulkner came into his own only after he had decided to make sense of the world he had known best: the places, the people in and around the Mississippi in Lafayette County where he had grown up; as Faulkner stated:

"I discovered that writing was a mighty fine thing. You could make people stand on their hind legs and cast a shadow. I felt that I had all these people, and as soon as I discovered it I wanted to bring them all back" (p.312).

Faulkner's first novel was *Soldier's Pay* (1926); the theme of which was on the returned soldier. The book is a decadent text about the malaise of the post-war society, from the view point of a world war veteran. In his book *Mosquitoes* (1927), the author describes the bohemian life in New Orleans. The two novels reflecting Faulkner's real life in the south were *Sartorius* (1929) and *The Sound and the Fury* (1929). In these two novels the author interprets the fundamental life of a southern society as being emblematic in human life in an age of war that constituted an age of lost hopes, stress and profound change in all domains.

Faulkner's feeling of being free to write and his will to continue writing, no matter what readers would think of his work, induced him to come up with *The Sound and the Fury*. The story is a part of the author's obsession with his past childhood recounting of his earliest years in the south. The novel consists of a moving story of the Compson family: four children and their inadequate parents. This story includes the tragedies of two lost women: Caddy and her daughter and the suicide of Quentin when in despair of having a love affair with his promiscuous sister Caddy he commits a suicide by drowning himself. The book is divided into four parts. It is only in the last episodes of the book that the story unfolds. The novel starts with Benjy as a moral conscience in which the rest of the family members can see their actions reflected. Benjy is the youngest and mentally handicapped sibling and the narrator of the first story on Saturday, April 7, 1928. Then, the second part is narrated by Quentin, the oldest sibling on June 2, 1910 at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The third section is narrated by Jason who is the third sibling, is set on Friday, April 6, 1928 in Jefferson, the day before Benjy's section. The final section, narrated by a third-person narrator, occurs on Easter Sunday, April 8, 1928, and follows Dilsey Gibson, the Compsons' cook, as she prepares meals and takes Benjy with her to church. Dilsey is the black servant who endures scolds and succumbs to the circumstances; she is a loving creature and has a strong will to preserve the Compsons' family tied together. Just before Quentin's death, the latter meets Herbert Head, Caddy's fiancé. Quentin despises him for his flattery and ostentations: he does not only offer Caddy expensive wedding presents and promises Jason a job at the bank he runs, but he also has the intention to bribe Quentin for fear that he will worsen his reputation at Harvard. When Quentin is alone, he begs her not to marry Head, but she runs off. Once when Quentin wants to embrace his sister Caddy, she pushes him away, telling him she is pregnant and must marry:

It was raining we could hear it on the roof, sighing through the high sweet
emptiness of the barn
There? touching her
Not there
There? not raining hard but we couldn't hear anything but the roof and as it was
my blood or her blood.
She pushed me down the ladder and ran off and left me Caddy did. Was it there
it hurt you when Caddy did run off was it there...
You pushed me it was your fault it hurt me too
We were dancing sitting down I bet Caddy can't dance sitting down
Stop that stop that
I was just brushing the trash off the back of your dress
You keep your nasty old hands off of me
It was your fault you pushed me down I'm mad at you
(Faulkner, pp. 123-24)

The Sound and the Fury addresses themes related to its fragmented structure as well as to gender and race. The treatment of racial marginalization constitutes one of the major themes in the novel. Dilsey Gibson, a woman who is marginalized by her race as well as by her gender. Faulkner clearly presents the racist attitudes of Mrs Compson who reprimands Dilsey when she

is going to dress Benji instead of preparing breakfast for the family. Faulkner expresses Dilsey's embarrassment at Mrs Compson's indifference and racial attitudes:

Disley said nothing. She made no further move, but though she could not see her save as blobby shape without depth, Mrs Compson knew that she had lowered her face a little and that she stood now like a cow in the rain, as she held the empty water bottle by its neck.

'You're not the one who has to bear it,' Mrs Compson said. 'It's not your responsibility. You can go away. You don't have to bear the brunt of it day in and day out. You owe nothing to them... I know you have never had any tenderness for Jason. You've never tried to conceal it' (p. 242).

Following the world depression in October 1929, everything was changed in America. Investments declined, businesses failed, stores and factories closed, banks collapsed, unemployment soared—from 5 million in 1930 to 13 million in 1932 (Reeves, p. 101). There were hardly any jobs available for job seekers. People lost their homes and savings, the jobless slept on park benches, the previously boating urban area and thriving resorts became poverty-stricken quarters.

The years of the 1930s constituted a turning point in American fiction. Many writers concerned with social class appeared. The authors started writing for the suffering masses, for example, Jack Conroy and Richard Wright who won the attention of the miserable minority groups. The slogan "art is a class weapon" was interpreted into the appearance of many partisan reviews such as *The New Masses* of Michael Gold which spoke of Jewish immigrants.

The first American Writers' Congress was founded in 1934. It officially adopted socialist realism and called for socialist realism to express social values (Habib, 2005, p. 541). The congress was set to engage writer's social class struggle and to assault liberalism. John Steinbeck (1902- 1968), in this domain, came as a physical writer – concerned with material things and not spiritual matters – depicted the crowd with the emotions of strike in his book *In Dubious Battle* (1936) that was about the migratory fruit pickers when striking. One year later, he wrote his successful book, *Of Mice and Men* which was a tragic story of friendship between two migratory workers. Because of the currents, Steinbeck was much interested in social problems and was attracted to California where he had spent most of his youth and had had much experience of life. As quoted by Ruland, Steinbeck said:

The fascinating thing to me is the way a group has a soul, a desire, an intent, an end, a method, a reaction and a set of tropisms which in no way resembles the same things possessed by the men who make the group (Ruland, p. 310).

The Grapes of Wrath (1939) is Steinbeck's depression epic which sums up the spirit of the 1930s. This work, besides being a social history about the migrants driven from Oklahoma farmlands, it is a protest novel. It was Steinbeck's challenge against agronomic carelessness and capitalists' indifference to peasants. It is also a 'corporate novel'. The significance of the migrants housed by the residents in the Highway 66 and in California is on the primal human

spirit that transcends all other powers. A very moving example is when the character Rose suckles a starving man to bring him back to life:

“Awready,” Pa said.

Tom asked, “Where’s Rosasharn?”

“Over there,” said Ma. “Come on, Rosasharn. We’re a-goin’.”

The girl sat still, her chin sunk on her breast. Tom walked over to her. “Come on,” he said.

“I ain’t a-goin’.” She did not raise her head.

“You got to go.”

“I want Connie. I ain’t a-goin’ till he comes back.”

(Steinbeck, 1941, p. 171)

What is interesting of *The Grapes of Wrath* is not the social event depicted in the book, but it is quite in the *heroism* and *courage* of the common people through the characters of Ma, Joad and Tom.

Conclusion

The inter-war period witnessed the climax of the American novel. There were American novelists who were inspired or else deeply affected by the WWI and by the great depression of 1929. There were war novelists such as Dos Passos and Hemingway as well as social novelists like Faulkner and Steinbeck. The works of both types of writers can be considered as protest novels as they express their authors’ anxiety and disfavor to their social surroundings, speaking on behalf of the commons and from experience. The number of the American authors I limited myself to discuss work and many others that neither the time nor the space are enough to talk about in this humble emerged mostly in the inter-war phase. Their literary influences ranged from their regional heir to cause a great impact on literature in the world over. Because of the “juxtaposition” i.e., the collage of the fragments collected from everyday life, most of the studied works in this phase blended the elite culture and popular culture. It is true that America is a huge melting pot. It is this multitude of the coexisting cultures and peoples in this part of the world that had enhanced novelists to spit out smart recounts of the currents in the form of stories imaginatively. Hemingway referred to society and American decision makers as the ones to blame for Harold Krebs’ nausea and mental torture. Similarly, Faulkner had to go back to his childhood to evoke his distress towards the Compsons who once had been aristocrats, but as time went by, the family was subject to disruption and tragedies when they started to run after their whims. The rise of the American novel in the inter-war phase came just in time to compensate the American readers generally and those citizens in the once-neglected areas to read about themselves and to be read about for years of neglect: Dilsey Gibson the negro servant from the south and the peasant family of Joad from the far west. Hemingway, Steinbeck, Faulkner and Fitzgerald came as avant-guard in making literature contribute to social problem solution and in narrowing the bridge among different trends in one society in one work; the thing that had never occurred formerly. They exposed the American social structure with its wide stratification, commenting on the sources of the social disintegration and letting the reader judge the situation. This genre of novel was a source of inspiration for many would be writers of protest and social novels in many world countries, particularly in the places

where societies were cracked by colonisation. The literary innovation brought about by the 20th century American novelists is a revolution in the history of literature. This has gained the inter-war novel a high respect and that has made the American authors of this phase subject to much debate in the literary realms.

About the Author:

Dr. NEBBOU, A. is a lecturer and a teacher researcher at University of Tahri Mohamed, Bechar Algeria. Author of many articles in various world journals. Fields of research: world Literatures , culture, language teaching & world civilizations.

* Muckraking: John Bunyan's alluded to the "man with a Muck-rake" in his *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), a person who could look only downward as he stirred the filth, unable to see the heavenly crown held above him. Mass magazines financed the investigations and published the work of muckrakers. Examples of muckraking novels include: Phillips' *Great God Success* (1901); Upton Sinclair's *Jungle* (1901); and the later books of the American Winston Churchill...

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