American Literature in Transition, 1920–1930 examines the dynamic interactions between social and literary fields during the so-called Jazz Age and it situates the era’s place in the incremental evolution of American literature throughout the twentieth century. Essays by preeminent critics and historians analyze more than twenty overlapping aspects of American letters in the 1920s and re-evaluate an astonishingly diverse group of authors. Expansive in scope and daring in its mixture of eclectic methods, this book extends the most exciting advances made in the last several decades in the fields of modernist studies, ethnic literatures, African-American literature, gender studies, transnational studies, and the history of the book. It examines how the world of literature intersected with other arts, such as cinema, jazz, and theater, and explores the print culture in transition, with focus on new publishing houses, trends in advertising, readership, and obscenity laws.

American Literature in Transition captures the dynamic energies transmitted across the 20th- and 21st-century American literary landscapes. Revisionary and authoritative, the series offers a comprehensive new overview of the established literary landmarks that constitute American literary life. Ambitious in scope and depth, and accommodating new critical perspectives and approaches, this series captures the dynamic energies and ongoing change in 20th- and 21st-century American literature. These are decades of transition, but also periods of epochal upheaval. These decades – the Jazz Age, the Great Depression, the Cold War, the sixties, 9/11 – are turning points of real significance. But in a tumultuous century, these terms can mask deeper structural changes. Each one of these books challenges in different ways the dominant approaches to a period of literature by shifting the focus from what happened to understanding how and why it happened. They elucidate the multifaceted interaction between the social and literary fields and capture that era’s place in the incremental evolution of American literature up to the present moment. Taken together, this series of books constitutes a new kind of literary history in a century of intense cultural and literary creation, a century of liberation and also of immense destruction too. As a revisionary project grounded in pre-existing debates, American Literature in Transition offers an unprecedented analysis of the American literary experience.

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AMERICAN LITERATURE IN TRANSITION, 1920–1930

EDITED BY

ICHIRO TAKAYOSHI

Tufts University
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Chronology

1912 The Woolworth Building completed. It remains the tallest building in the world until 1930.

Poetry: A Magazine of Verse is founded in Chicago by Harriet Monroe.

1913 The Armory Show gives New York its first glimpse of the Cubist and Post-Impressionist painters.

1914 The first issue of The Little Review appears in Chicago.

The New Republic, edited by Herbert Croly.

1917 U.S. entry into the Great War.

Marcus Garvey arrives in Harlem and founds the United Negro Improvement Association. In June, ten million men register for the draft on a dramatic day of government propaganda and patriotic events throughout the country.

1918 Armistice

1919 Sherwood Anderson, Winesburg, Ohio; Waldo Frank, Our America; Joseph Hergesheimer, Java Head; James Branch Cabell, Jurgen; John Reed, Ten Days That Shook the World

In February, African-American soldiers of the 369th Infantry Regiment, called the Harlem Hellfighters, march up Fifth Avenue in New York City to Harlem, where they receive a hero’s welcome from an interracial crowd of black and white New Yorkers.

The First Red Scare

Race riots break out in more than two-dozen major cities. The New York Daily News, the first U.S. tabloid, is founded.

1920 Ezra Pound, Instigations of Ezra Pound, together with an essay on the Chinese written character (Boni and Liveright); Eugene O’Neill, The Emperor Jones; Edna Millay, A Few Figs from Thistles; Sinclair Lewis, Main Street; F. Scott Fitzgerald, This
**Chronology**


*Beyond the Horizon*, Eugene O’Neill’s first full-length play, gets the Pulitzer Prize.

Scofield Thayer and James Sibley Watson buy *The Dial*.

William Dean Howells dies.

Ezra Pound secures an excerpt of *The Guermantes Way* for publication in *The Dial* (Proust’s first appearance in English).

First radio news program is broadcast by station 8MK in Detroit, Michigan.

First time U.S. census counts more people living in urban areas than rural ones.

In January, the Eighteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, prohibiting the manufacture, transportation, and sale of alcoholic beverages, goes into effect.

In August, the Nineteenth Amendment, giving women the right to vote, is ratified.

*The Flapper*, starring Olive Thomas, introduces the “flapper” type and lifestyle.

Congress repeals the Sedition Act, which has been used during the Great War to suppress dissent in print.

Station KDKA in Pittsburgh takes the first step into broadcast news by informing listeners about the outcome of the presidential election.

1921


Street & Smith begins publishing *Love Story Magazine*; pulp publishers Fiction House and Dell Publications founded.

The year of *The Sheik*, starring Rudolph Valentino.

*New York World* editor Herbert Bayard Swope invents the newspaper “op-ed” page for regular commentary from multiple points of view.

Margaret Sanger founds the American Birth Control League.

In February, *The Little Review* is found guilty of publishing obscene materials (excerpts from Joyce’s *Ulysses*) in New York State court. Editors Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap fined.

Mike Gold publishes “Toward Proletarian Art” in the February issue of *The Liberator*.
“Shule Along” runs for 504 performances, with Josephine Baker and Paul Robeson in the chorus. Magazines are being founded in Europe for expatriates: Gargoyle in Paris and Broom in Rome.*

1922
Sinclair Lewis, Babbitt; T. S. Eliot, The Waste Land; e. e. cummings, The Enormous Room
T. S. Eliot launches The Criterion Magazine.
Benito Mussolini is appointed Italian premier.
First color movie, The Toll of the Sea.
Sylvia Beach at Shakespeare and Company publishes the first edition of Ulysses.

1923
Wallace Stevens, Harmonium; William Carlos Williams, Spring and All; Jean Toomer, Cane; Robert Frost, New Hampshire
The decade’s dance sensation, the “Charleston,” is introduced in Irving C. Miller’s musical Liza.
“Yes, We Have No Bananas” becomes a major hit.
Reese’s Peanut Butter Cups are introduced to consumers.
Launch of TIME magazine by Henry Luce and Briton Hadden. It becomes the foundation of the TIME-Life empire.
The first issue of The American Mercury (dated January 1924) appears in December with its green cover. Great commotion over Ernest Boyd’s article, “Esthete: Model 1924.”*

1924
Marianne Moore, Observations; Edna Ferber, So Big; Herman Melville, Billy Bud, Sailor (posthumous); Gilbert Seldes, The Seven Lively Arts
Louis Armstrong joins Fletcher Henderson’s orchestra.
The Immigration Act of 1924 restricts immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe and Africa and bans immigration of Arabs and Asians.
A. E. Orage comes to New York and spreads the Gurdjieff craze.
Jean Toomer among the first converts.*
Civic Club Dinner, sponsored by Opportunity, brings black writers and white publishers together.
Paul Whiteman conducts “An Experiment in Modern Music,” including the first performance of George Gershwin’s “Rhapsody in Blue.”
Chronology

The 35-mm Leica camera is introduced, revolutionizing photojournalism.
Macy’s department store hosts its first Thanksgiving Day Parade.
Calvin Coolidge, who proclaimed, “the business of America is business,” is elected President of the United States.
Andre Breton, “First Manifesto of Surrealism.”
Vladimir Lenin dies.
In March, book party is held for Jessie Fauset at the Civic Club, the event some consider the launch of the Harlem Renaissance.

1925
The Scopes “Monkey” Trial in Dayton, Tennessee pits William Jennings Bryan against Clarence Darrow in the trial of a high school biology teacher who violated state law by teaching evolution. The law in question, the Butler Act, will be repealed in 1967.
The *New Yorker* is founded by Harold Ross, with help from his friends – “not for the old lady from Dubuque.”
“Hatrick Case” pits H. L. Mencken against the Boston Watch and Ward Society.

1926
In April, first issue of Hugo Gernsback’s pulp magazine *Amazing Stories* appears, the first magazine devoted to “scientifiction,” later called science fiction.
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Chronology

In April, the Book-of-the-Month Club announces its first choice: *Lolly Willowes* by Sylvia Townsend Warner.

In November, Joseph T. Shaw takes over as editor of *Black Mask*

*Rudolph Valentino* dies at age thirty-one.

*The New Masses* takes the place of *The Liberator*, now defunct.

Eugene Debs, one of the founders of the Industrial Workers of the World and the five-time presidential candidate of the Socialist Party, dies.

Oswald Spengler’s *Decline of the West* becomes available in English.*

Coco Chanel introduces the “little black dress.”

U.S. Route 66, aka the Will Rogers Highway, is established, connecting Chicago and Santa Monica.

1927

*Thornton Wilder*, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*; *Sinclair Lewis*, *Elmer Gantry*; *James Weldon Johnson*, *God’s Trombone*; *Upton Sinclair*, *Oil!*; *Margaret Mead*, *Coming of Age in Samoa*

In May, Charles Lindbergh completes the first transatlantic flight.

*Showboat* opens on Broadway.

*New York Times* columnist Anne O’Hare McCormick visits the Soviet Union and writes *The Hammer and the Scythe*.

Random House is founded by Bennett Cerf and Donald Klopfer.

Sacco and Vanzetti are executed.

*Transition* is founded in Paris; *Hound and Horn* appears in Cambridge, Massachusetts.*

*Thomas Mann’s* *The Magic Mountain* comes out in English.*

The first *American Caravan*, edited by Alfred Kreymborg, Paul Rosenfeld, and Lewis Munford, collects the new writers into one big volume.*

First systematic use of the term “sexual revolution” (in *Modern Quarterly*)

*Zora Neale Hurston* begins Freudian-inflected ethnography of African-American culture.

The Cotton Club hires Duke Ellington, after King Oliver turns down the offer.

*Babe Ruth* hits his sixtieth home run of the regular season; this home run record stands until 1961.

The first talkie, “The Jazz Singer,” informs its audiences that “you ain’t heard nothin’ yet.”
Chronology

1928

The Modern Library issues James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* in cheap editions, thus widening the audience for “difficult” modernist texts.

*Steamboat Willie* premieres on November 18.

The exodus to Europe peaks. During the year 437,000 Americans leave the country.*

1929

On February 14, the “St. Valentine’s Day Massacre” takes place in Chicago, in which six members of “Bugs” Moran’s gang are shot and killed, along with an innocent bystander.

In April, the Gastonia strike begins – eventually the subject of at least four proletarian novels and two plays.*

In October, the Stock Market crashes.


*The Dial* ceases publication.*

*Transition* prints the Manifesto of the Word. Harry Crosby signs it.*

Skirts suddenly get longer, bringing back the atmosphere of 1919.*

1930
Sinclair Lewis wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Passage of the Smoot-Hawley Tariff.

1933
In December, the 21st Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is ratified; this amendment repeals the 18th Amendment and brings an end to the era of national prohibition of alcohol.
