American Literature in Transition, 1930–1940 gathers together in a single volume preeminent critics and historians to offer an authoritative, analytic, and theoretically advanced account of the Depression era’s key literary events. Many topics of canonical importance, such as protest literature, Hollywood fiction, the culture industry, and populism, receive fresh treatment. The book also covers emerging areas of interest, such as radio drama, bestsellers, religious fiction, internationalism, and middlebrow domestic fiction. Traditionally, scholars have treated each one of these issues in isolation. This volume situates all the significant literary developments of the 1930s within a single and capacious vision that discloses their hidden structural relations – their contradictions, similarities, and reciprocities. This is an excellent resource for undergraduate and graduate students, and for scholars interested in American literary culture of the 1930s.

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, 1930–1940

EDITED BY

ICHIRO TAKAYOSHI

Tufts University
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Chronology

1929
Books: Sartoris (William Faulkner), The Sound and the Fury (Faulkner), A Farewell to Arms (Ernest Hemingway), Look Homeward, Angel (Thomas Wolfe), Daughter of Earth (Agnes Smedley), Middletown (Robert and Helen Lynd).

April. The Gastonia Strike begins. It will be the subject of at least four proletarian novels and two plays.

May. The Little Review ceases publication.

July. The Dial ceases publication.

October. Black Thursday. The Dow Jones Industrial Average plunges 11 percent. The beginning of the Wall Street Crash.

October. Staff members of The New Masses found the John Reed Club.


1930
Books: Jews without Money (Michael Gold), The Woman of Andros (Thornton Wilder), Ash Wednesday (T. S. Eliot), The Bridge (Hart Crane), The 42nd Parallel (John Dos Passos), I’ll Take My Stand (the Southern Agrarians), Cimarron (Edna Ferber), The Maltese Falcon (Dashiell Hammett), As I Lay Dying (William Faulkner), Not without Laughter (Langston Hughes), Laughing Boy (Oliver La Farge), Dance Night (Dawn Powell), Exile (Warwick Deeping), Black Manhattan (James Weldon Johnson), Mixed Marriage (Margaret Banning), A Draft of XXX Cantos (Ezra Pound).

February. Time Inc. launches Fortune magazine.

August. Amos ‘n’ Andy starts broadcasting.

October. The first “soap opera,” Painted Dreams, debuts on Chicago radio station WGN.

October. Ethel Merman makes her Broadway debut in the Gershwin brothers’ musical Girl Crazy. One of her most famous songs is “I Got Rhythm.”
November. Sinclair Lewis wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
Agnes Smedley crosses paths with Soviet spy Richard Sorge in Shanghai. She introduces him to Hotsumi Ozaki.
Deaths: D. H. Lawrence, Herbert Croly, Pauline Hopkins.

February. A special issue of *Poetry* dedicated to Objectivism appears.
March. “The Star-Spangled Banner,” by Francis Scott Key, is approved by the government as the national anthem.
March. Nevada legalizes gambling.
April. The trials of the Scottsboro Boys start in Alabama.
May. The Empire State Building, the world’s tallest, is opened by President Hoover.
October. The Dick Tracy comic strip appears.
November. H. L. Mencken’s *American Mercury* quantifies the South’s backwardness in “The Worst American State: Part III.”
Harold Clurman, Cheryl Crawford, and Lee Strasberg form the Group Theater. The Group launches the career of Clifford Odets.
The exodus of Broadway talent to Hollywood picks up.
Deaths: Khalil Gibran, Vachel Lindsay, Bix Beiderbecke.

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March. The infant son of Charles and Anne Morrow Lindbergh is kidnapped.
April. Hart Crane kills himself, aged thirty-two.
May. William Faulkner arrives in Culver City, California. The beginning of a long captivity in Moviedom.
May. Al Capone goes to jail for tax evasion.
June. Langston Hughes arrives in Moscow as part of a group of African Americans hired to act in a Soviet film about race relations in the American South.
The stock market bottoms out. The Dow Jones Industrial Average sinks to 41.22 (down from 381.17 in September 1929). The market doesn’t regain its previous peak until November 1954.
November. Franklin Delano Roosevelt defeats incumbent President Hoover.
T. S. Eliot returns to the United States to assume the Charles Eliot Norton professorship at Harvard for the 1932–33 academic year.
Whittaker Chambers goes underground as a spy for a GRU apparatus.
Deaths: Charles Chestnutt.

1933
Books: My Life and Hard Times (James Thurber), The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas (Gertrude Stein), God’s Little Acre (Erskine Caldwell), Miss Lonely Hearts (Nathanael West), Anthony Adverse (Hervey Allen), Banana Bottom (Claude McKay), The Disinherited (Jack Conroy), Mis-Education of the Negro (Carter G. Woodson), Eimi (e. e. cummings), Hungry Men (Edward Anderson), Unfinished Cathedral (T. S. Stribling), Ann Vickers (Sinclair Lewis).
January. Adolf Hitler is appointed as Chancellor of Germany. The beginning of the Third Reich.
March. FDR is inaugurated. The beginning of the New Deal.
May. Book burnings in Germany are carried out by the German Student Union, mainly works by Jewish intellectuals.
May. Disney cartoon Three Little Pigs is released.
October. Men’s magazine Esquire is founded and thrives, mixing men’s fashion with highbrow literature. Fitzgerald’s The Crack-Up and Pietro di Donato’s “Christ in Concrete” originally appear in this magazine.
November. A strong dust storm takes place in South Dakota. The beginning of the environmental crisis in the “Dust Bowl.”

November. Billie Holiday’s recording debut with Benny Goodman, produced by John Hammond. Two recordings: “Your Mother’s Son-in-Law” and “Riffin’ the Scotch.”

December. Raymond Chandler debuts in Black Mask.

December. Tobacco Road opens on Broadway. It plays for an astonishing 3,182 performances, breaking Broadway records.


December. The Twenty-First Amendment is repealed. The end of Prohibition.

Unemployment peaks at 24.9 percent.

Albert Einstein takes up a position at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, NJ.

Deaths: Ring Lardner.

1934

Books: Tender Is the Night (F. Scott Fitzgerald), ABC of Reading (Ezra Pound), Eleven New Cantos: XXXI-XLI (Pound), Tropic of Cancer (Henry Miller), The Thin Man (Dashiell Hammett), The Postman Always Rings Twice (James M. Cain), A Cool Million (Nathanael West), Jonah’s Gourd Vine (Zora Neal Hurston), Appointment in Samarra (John O’Hara), Call It Sleep (Henry Roth), Patterns of Culture (Ruth Benedict), The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan (James T. Farrell), It Can Happen Here (Sinclair Lewis), The Last Puritan (George Santayana), The League of Freighted Men (Rex Stout), The Story of a Country Boy (Dawn Powell), Summer in Williamsburg (Daniel Fuchs), Technics and Civilization (Lewis Mumford), After Strange Gods (T. S. Eliot), The Land of Plenty (Robert Cantwell), Heaven Is My Destination (Thornton Wilder), Ladies Go Masked (Margaret Widdemer), Beauty’s Daughter (Kathleen Thompson Norris).

January. Following United States v. One Book Called Ulysses, Random House publishes the first authorized edition in America. It has 12,000 advance sales.

May. A Pravda article hints at a turn in the Communist International (Comintern) policy toward Western democracies. The end of the ultra-left “Third Period” and the beginning of the Popular Front.

July. John Dillinger is gunned down in front of the Biograph Theater in Chicago by FBI agents.
Chronology

October. Gertrude Stein begins her tour of America. She will return to France in May 1935.

October. The Chinese Red Army begins the Long March.

November. Lillian Hellman’s first successful play, The Children’s Hour, premieres on Broadway.


December. The murder of Sergei Kirov in Leningrad. Stalin uses this as a pretext to launch the Great Purge.

The Motion Picture Association of America begins strictly enforcing the Production Code (the so-called Hays Code), which was adopted in 1930.

Deaths: Wallace Thurman, Rudolph Fisher.

1935 Books: Tortilla Flat (John Steinbeck), Judgment Day (James T. Farrell), Green Hills of Africa (Ernest Hemingway), The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze (William Saroyan), Somebody in Boots (Nelson Algren), Theory of Flight (Muriel Rukeyser), They Shoot Horses, Don’t They? (Horace McCoy), no thanks (e. e. cummings), An Early Martyr (William Carlos Williams), Vein of Iron (Ellen Grasgow), Green Light (Lloyd C. Douglas), Selected Poems (Marianne Moore), The Journeyman (Erskine Caldwell), Of Time and the River (Thomas Wolfe), Permanence and Change (Kenneth Burke).

January. Clifford Odets’s Waiting for Lefty, a play inspired by a 1934 strike of New York City cab drivers, premieres at a benefit for New Theater magazine.

February. The Group Theatre produces Clifford Odets’s Awake and Sing on Broadway.

March. Germany unilaterally declares rearmament.

April. The First Congress of the League of American writers is held. The Americanization of Communism.

April. The Resettlement Administration (RA), the brainchild of Rexford Tugwell is founded, and is reorganized as the Farm Security Administration in 1937. Its Historical Section (the Photography Section under the FSA) is headed by Roy Stryker. FDR appoints filmmaker Pare Lorentz to the RA, who makes The Plow That Broke the Plain and The River.

June. The greatest hitter in the history of baseball, Babe Ruth retires.

June. Alcoholics Anonymous is founded in Akron, Ohio.
Summer. A flurry of legislative activities occurs (the Second New Deal): the Social Security Act, the Works Progress Administration (WPA), the Wagner Act.

July. The WPA funds a number of programs that employ writers and artists, such as the Federal Writers’ Project (FWP) and the Federal Theater Project.


August. The Social Security Act is passed.

September. The Hoover Dam is dedicated.

October. Langston Hughes’s play Mulatto opens on Broadway.

October. Italy invades Ethiopia.

October. Huey Long is assassinated.


November. Charles Coughlin founds the National Union for Social Justice.

November. F. Scott Fitzgerald moves to Hendersonville, North Carolina, stays at a cheap hotel, and writes *The Crack-Up* while eating canned food and tens of thousands of dollars in debt, with less than 40 cents in cash and a $13 deficit at his bank.

Deaths: Charlotte Perkins Gilman.


April. The opening of the “voodoo” *Macbeth* at the Lafayette Theater in Harlem, directed by Orson Welles.

June. Pope Pius XI issues an encyclical to US bishops entitled “On Motion Pictures.”

June–July. James Agee and Walker Evans travel from New York City to Alabama on assignment for *Fortune* magazine.
Chronology

July. Ralph Ellison moves from Alabama to New York City.
July. The Spanish Civil War starts.
August. The Berlin Summer Olympics are held. Jesse Owens wins four gold medals. Hitler refuses to be photographed with him.
October. Eugene O’Neill is awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.
Fall. John Steinbeck tours the San Joaquin Valley with Eric H. Thomsen, regional director of the federal migrant camp program, and sees the plight of migrant laborers firsthand.
November. FDR is reelected.
November. Henry Luce’s Time Inc. launches Life magazine.
December. George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart’s You Can’t Take It with You premières on Broadway.
December. The United Auto Workers, part of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, begins a sit-down strike at the General Motors plant in Flint, Michigan.
The fertility rate hits the bottom. 75 per 100,000 women aged 15–44 (93 in 1928).
Deaths: Harriet Monroe, Irving Thalberg.

1937
Books: Of Mice and Men (John Steinbeck), The Citadel (A. J. Cronin), The Fifth Decade of Cantos (Ezra Pound), To Have and Have Not (Ernest Hemingway), Their Eyes Were Watching God (Zora Neale Hurston), The Good Society (Walter Lippmann), Red Star over China (Edgar Snow), A Long Way from Home (Claude McKay), Low Company (Daniel Fuchs), Middletown in Transition (Robert and Hellen Lynd), The Man with the Blue Guitar (Wallace Stevens), White Mule (William Carlos Williams), You Have Seen Their Faces (Margaret Bourke-White and Erskine Caldwell), Thieves Like Us (Edward Anderson), Northwest Passage (Kenneth Roberts), And China Has Hands (H. T. Tsiang), The Importance of Living (Lin Yutang), Attitudes toward History (Kenneth Burke), American Stuff: An Anthology of Prose and Verse by Members of the Federal Writers’ Project.

April. Archibald MacLeish’s “The Fall of the City” is broadcast over the Columbia Broadcasting System as part of the Columbia Workshop radio series.
April. Guernica is bombed.
May. The Golden Gate Bridge opens.
June. The League of American Writers holds its Second
Congress. The civil war in Spain is the main concern.

June. Valery Chkalov flies nonstop from Moscow, Soviet
Union to Vancouver, Washington, US, via the North Pole.


July. The Marco Polo Bridge Incident occurs in which Japan
invades China proper.

July. F. Scott Fitzgerald reports at MGM, $22,000 in debt.

November. Musical revue *Pins and Needles* opens on
Broadway. The cast are all members of the International
Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union. An unexpected hit, it runs
for 1,108 performances.

FDR prematurely tries to balance the budget. The Roosevelt
Recession ensues.

Deaths: George Gershwin, H. P. Lovecraft, Edith Wharton,
Don Marquis.

1938

Books: *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities* (Delmore Schwartz),
*The Coming Victory of Democracy* (Thomas Mann), *Homage to
Catalonia* (George Orwell), *The Late George Apley* (John P.
Marquand), *Uncle Tom’s Children* (Richard Wright), *The
Happy Island* (Dawn Powell), *I Should Have Stayed Home*
(Horace McCoy), *Life along the Passaic* (William Carlos
Williams), *All This, and Heaven Too* (Rachel Field), *My
America* (Louis Adamic), *The World’s Body* (John Crow
Ransom), *Understanding Poetry* (Cleanth Brooks and Robert
Penn Warren), *The Hill Grows Steeper* (Fannie Cook).

February. Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town* opens on Broadway.

July. The Justice Department begins antitrust proceedings
against Hollywood studios. The beginning of the end of the
studio system.

October. The Munich Crisis.

October. Archibald MacLeish’s radio drama “Air Raid” is
broadcast.

October. Orson Welles’s radio adaptation of *The War of the
Worlds* is broadcast in The Mercury Theatre on the Air series.

October. Pearl S. Buck wins the Nobel Prize in Literature.

November. Irving Berlin’s “God Bless America” is sung by
Kate Smith on her radio show on Armistice Day.

Whittaker Chambers breaks with the Communist Party and
goes into hiding with his family.

1939


January. W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood emigrate together to America.

March. The *Anschluss*, the German annexation of Austria, takes place.


April. Norman Corwin’s radio drama “They Fly through the Air with the Greatest of Ease” is broadcast.

April. The New York World’s Fair opens in Queens, NY. The Fair will draw 45 million paid visitors in the next two years.

April. Marian Anderson sings at the Lincoln Memorial.

April. Ezra Pound sails for the United States, convinced that he will stop American involvement in the approaching war.

June. The League of American Writers holds its Third Congress.

August. The Nazi–Soviet Pact is signed. The fatal blow to the Popular Front.

August. Albert Einstein meets with FDR and discusses an A-bomb possibility.

September. Germany invades Poland. The beginning of World War II in Europe.

A banner year on Broadway: *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* (Robert Sherwood), *The Philadelphia Story* (Philip Barry), *The Little
Chronology

Foxes (Lillian Hellman), The Man Who Came to Dinner (Kaufman and Hart), The Time of Your Life (William Saroyan).

A banner year in Hollywood: The Wizard of Oz, Gone with the Wind, Stagecoach, Mr. Smith Goes to Washington, Wuthering Heights, Ninotchka.

Simon & Schuster starts its paperback division, Pocket Books, revolutionizing the publishing industry.

Congress ends funding for the FWP.

Thomas Mann emigrates to the United States.

Deaths: Sigmund Freud, W. B. Yeats, S. S. Van Dine (Willard Huntington Wright), Havelock Ellis, Zane Grey, Heywood Broun, Sidney Howard.

1940

Books: Native Son (Richard Wright), For Whom the Bell Tolls (Ernest Hemingway), Cantos LXII-LXXI (Ezra Pound), The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter (Carson McCullers), To the Finland Station (Edmund Wilson), Sapphira and the Slave (Willa Cather), Farewell, My Lovely (Raymond Chandler), How to Read a Book (Mortimer J. Adler), My Name Is Aram (William Saroyan), Angels on Toast (Dawn Powell), Harlem: Negro Metropolis (Claude McKay), 50 Poems (e. e. cummings), In the Money (William Carlos Williams), From Many Lands (Louis Adamic).

February. Woody Guthrie writes “This Land Is Your Land,” the antiwar rejoinder to Irving Berlin’s “God Bless America.”

April. Robert Sherwood’s interventionist play, There Shall Be No Night, opens on Broadway and wins Sherwood his third Pulitzer Prize.

August. Varian Fry arrives in Marseilles. He will smuggle out anti-Nazi intellectuals and artists, including Marc Chagall, André Breton, Max Ernst, and Hannah Arendt.

October. Louis Adamic launches the Common Ground magazine.

September. Congress passes the first peacetime conscription bill.

November. FDR is reelected, becoming the first man to hold the presidency for three terms.

Deaths: F. Scott Fitzgerald, Nathanael West, Marcus Garvey.

1941

Books: Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (James Agee, Walker Evans), Twelve Million Black Voices (Richard Wright), The Last
Tycoon (F. Scott Fitzgerald), What Makes Sammy Run (Budd Schulberg), The Ground We Stand On (John Dos Passos), American Renaissance (F. O. Matthiessen), A Leaf in the Storm (Lin Yutang), The New Criticism (John Crow Ransom), Philosophy of Literary Form (Kenneth Burke).

January. FDR gives his “Four Freedoms” speech.

January. From Rome, Ezra Pound starts broadcasting a seemingly incoherent medley of economic analysis, political commentary, and literary divagations.

February. Henry Luce declares that his country owns the twentieth century. “The American Century” appears in Life.

June. Germany invades the Soviet Union in Operation Barbarossa.

September. Melvin Tolson’s “Dark Symphony” appears in Atlantic Monthly.

September. Walter Benjamin kills himself in Portbou, Spain. He was on his way to the United States, reading Herman Melville to brush up on his English.

December. The Japanese attack Pearl Harbor. The United States enters World War II.