

**Leopards in the Temple:
The Transformation of
American Fiction, 1945–1970**

Morris Dickstein

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The notion that the cultural upheaval of the 1960s had roots in World War II is quickly becoming a standard theme in American historical writing. To this pursuit of a "counterculture" of the 1940s and 1950s, *Leopards in the Temple* will add a considerable stock of insight. In highly sophisticated, judicious assessments of Norman Mailer, Saul Bellow, Jack Kerouac, and Ralph Ellison (among many others), Dickstein shows how and why these novelists pressed a radical imprint on America's literary imagination even while they turned away from the social and political consciousness of their predecessors. This compelling argument, however, hardly justifies Dickstein's stock dismissal of leftist critics of the period's political repression as "ideological." (Why do revisionists so easily imagine their work is bereft of ideology?) Those who criticized the cultural repression and political exploitation demanded by the Cold War, however limited their perspectives, prepared the way for the wider influence that Dickstein's "band of outsiders" came to enjoy. Culture does little work in the world without a political struggle worthy of its ideals, a point that seems forever lost on the complacent wing of modern liberal thought.

—John Summers